




IVAN DE BIRON

SIR ARTHUR HELPS







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IVAN DE BIRON

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

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IVAN DE BIRON

OR, THE

Russian Court in the Middle of Last Century

BY

SIR ARTHUR HELPS

AUTHOR OF "FRIENDS IN COUNCIL," "ANIMALS AND THEIR MASTERS"
ETC.



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BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE RUSSIAN COURT, A.D. 1740.

ON the 18th of October, 1740, Mr. Finch, the English Ambassador at St. Petersburg, sent a despatch to Lord Harrington, then Secretary of State for the Northern Department, in which were the following words :—

“The Empress Anne died in the night of the 17th of October; the end of her life having been attended with such exquisite torments, that even those who had the greatest interest in her preservation, could only pray to God for her being delivered from so much misery. The Princesses Elizabeth and Anne took leave of her two hours before her death; the Duke of Courland was with her to her end.”

The Princess Elizabeth was the daughter of Peter the Great and Catharine the First. As, however, Peter's wife and Catharine's husband were alive at the time when the Princess Elizabeth was born, her legitimate claims to the

throne were very small; and, during the two preceding reigns, she had been passed over in the succession.

The Princess Anne was the granddaughter of Peter's elder brother. She had recently been married to Anthony Ulric, Grand Duke of Brunswick. They were a young couple, the Grand Duke being twenty-four years, and his Duchess twenty-two years, of age. A child had been born to them, named Ivan, who was but two months old at the date of the death of the Empress Anne, announced in the foregoing extract of the despatch to the Court of St. James's.

It may here be mentioned that Peter the Great had arrogated to himself and his successors the privilege of naming the person in the Imperial family who should succeed to the throne, independently of the claims of heirship.

Mr. Finch, in subsequent passages of his despatch, declares that "all is quiet at St. Petersburg; and that everything looks prosperous for the new *régime*." We may conclude, however, with the historian Von Raumer, that this glowing account of the state of things at the Russian Court was meant to be read by the Authorities. There were other parts of the despatch written in cypher, which might have told a different tale. At any rate, a different tale was to be told at the time when the despatch reached the Court of St. James's.

It was on the very day that Mr. Finch's letter was placed in the hands of Lord Harrington, that in a room of the Summer Palace of St. Petersburg, there sat a young man busily engaged writing at a table covered with maps and papers. This young man's name was Ivan

de Biron, and he was the private Secretary of John Ernest de Biron, Duke of Courland, the newly appointed Regent of Russia. Raised from a low condition, the son of a Master-huntsman, and the grandson of a groom, the Duke* had been the favourite of the late Empress Anne. For the last eight years of her reign, he had been her principal Minister; and his government had been distinguished by its vigour, its sternness, and its implacable severity during the whole of that period. No fewer than ten thousand human beings were languishing in exile in Siberia, victims to his suspicious temper and cruel disposition.

The last will of the Empress Anne declared as her successor Ivan the Third, an infant of two months old, the son, as before stated, of Anthony Ulric, Duke of Brunswick, and of Anne the granddaughter of Peter the Great's elder brother.

In a clause of the same will, the Empress Anne confided the Regency of Russia to the Duke of Courland, whose powers were to continue in force until Ivan the Third should be seventeen years of age.

Such was the state of things when our story commences. The Duke's private Secretary before-mentioned, was a young man of frank demeanour and of prepossessing appearance. Any observer of physiognomy, however, could

* Throughout this narrative the Duke of Courland is called *Biron*. His family name was *Biren* or *Bühren*. The groom and the master-huntsman, his grandfather and his father, had been contented with that mode of spelling the family name; but when the Duke rose to power, it was discovered that the Birens were connections of the renowned Ducs de Biron in France; and, accordingly, the Regent wrote his name *Biron*.

not but have noticed the expression of mingled fear, mistrust, and weariness which seemed to have taken possession, as it were, of the young man's countenance. And if such an observer had gone into the adjacent rooms, he could not but have seen that, in a lesser degree, the same expression sat upon the faces of the numerous secretaries, under-secretaries, and clerks, who formed the official establishment of the all-powerful Duke-Regent of Russia. It was no easy task to execute the orders of such a man as Biron, who demanded not only obedience and fidelity, but the strictest acquiescence and approval. The slightest murmur or objection on the part of any one of his retainers, might be the first step on the road to Siberia for that ill-advised individual.

The thoughts of the Private Secretary, occasionally expressed in words, ran thus:—"More arrests; more orders for exile; more work for the executioner;—and when will my turn come? They pay court to me, the slaves, because I am related to him. They do not see that I am but a hostage in his hands for the good behaviour of his relations, whom he hates and fears as much as he does the rest of the world. What if I were to forge a passport for myself, and fly? But no: there is the Princess Marie. I may yet do something to render her exile less miserable. Little she knows who would give his life to save hers."

Who was the Princess Marie, and how was it that Ivan de Biron was so much interested in her that his care for her welfare should be a sufficient inducement to stay him in the design which he was, otherwise, almost inclined to adopt—to quit the service of the Duke of Courland, and

seek peace and safety in some other country than Russia?

The Princess Marie Andréeвна was the only daughter of a certain Prince Serbatoff, who had served officially in several departments of the State. He had, however, the misfortune of being nearly connected with the Dolgorouckis, a family most hateful to the Duke of Courland. On their downfall, Prince Serbatoff had been involved in their ruin, and had been banished to Siberia. His daughter, Marie, had previously been presented at Court, and had been one of the young ladies who, from her beauty and her wit, had attracted the observation of all the young men who had the privilege of attending the Court balls and festivities given by the late Empress Anne.

Ivan de Biron, as the Secretary to the Duke of Courland, attended his master, and was present at these festivities. From his comparatively humble rank, he had enjoyed no opportunities of addressing, or even approaching his idol; but he had worshipped her from a distance; and to him, there was no one to be compared to the Princess Marie Andréeвна Serbatoff.

To his romantic nature, it was peculiarly delightful to think, that, obscure as he was, he could do her more service than any of her grand admirers among the highest classes; and he had constituted himself, unknown to her, or to any of her family, as their protector. It was, at the present moment, the main object of his life, secretly to befriend them. Whatever comfort or consolation could be provided on the journey of the Serbatoffs to Siberia, had been provided by the loving watchfulness of Ivan; and now he could not forego the opportunity, which his near

relationship and official proximity to the Duke of Courland gave him, of mitigating the misery in exile of this family, and perhaps of restoring them to their previous position in the State.

Ivan was still absorbed in thought when the Regent suddenly entered the room—a stern-looking, handsome, commanding man, about fifty-four years of age. The most remarkable thing to be noticed in the expression of his countenance was, that craft seemed there to struggle with passion, and to have been superinduced upon it. A similar trait was noticeable in all that he said and did. Sometimes he spoke with exceeding suavity: sometimes the natural fierceness of his soul broke out in tones and language of resistless severity. His greeting of his Private Secretary was on this occasion very suave and graciously familiar.

“Ivan, dear child, (what a fortunate youth to have the same name as his sovereign!) Ivan, my dear, are the despatches for Denmark and England ready—those announcing my Regency?”

“Yes, your Highness, they are.”

Then came a question in a very different tone. “Are the orders to the Commandant of Schlüsselberg for the reception of those wretches prepared?”

“Yes, your Highness, they are here.”

The Regent then sat down, and began to sign the various letters and orders that were brought to him by the Secretary.

Suddenly, a noise outside of joyful exclamation was heard. The Regent started. “Go to the window,” he said, “see what fools are there. We cannot be disturbed now. These hired plaudits do not delight me. You should stop them, Ivan.”

The Secretary went to the window, and timidly announced that the Field Marshal, Count Münnich, was coming across the Grand Square ; and that the soldiers of the guard, and some of the citizens, were receiving him with shouts of applause.

“ Ha ! it was for him, then, was it ? ” said the Regent, as he went on signing the papers. After a minute or two, he added, “ What regiment is on duty to day ? ”—a question which boded no good to that regiment. Before, however, the Secretary could answer the question, the Field Marshal was announced, and had entered the room.

Great as was then that man’s renown, it is necessary now to explain who he was, and how he had gained that renown. It would mightily have astonished most men in that age, and no one more than his somewhat vain and arrogant self, that there should be this necessity : for his fame was European.

Marshal Münnich was born in 1683, in the Duchy of Oldenburg. His ancestors were noble ; but their chief distinction was to be found in the fields of science rather than of war. A genius for mathematics and skill in engineering were hereditary in the Münnich family ; and the Field Marshal had a full share of these hereditary talents.

At the early age of sixteen, he commenced his career as a soldier. He served with credit under Marlborough, and was present at the battle of Ramilies. Afterwards he took service with Prince Eugène, and accompanied that great commander throughout his campaigns in Italy and Flanders.

Münnich then chose Russia as his field of

action ; but, at first, found no favour with Peter the Great. The refined manners of the young German were repellent to the hard nature and coarse habits of the Czar.

That shrewd employer, however, soon discovered the singular capacity which Münnich had for hydraulic engineering ; and the Emperor entrusted to him the conduct of his greatest civil enterprise—the formation of the Canal of Ladoga. On his deathbed, the Czar derived some comfort from hearing of the progress of the works at Ladoga ; and he must have been satisfied with the engineer, for he exclaimed, “ *J’espère que les travaux de Münnich me guériront* ”—a hope that was not to be fulfilled.

Peter’s widow, Catharine, pressed on the works at Ladoga ; but she did not live to see them completed. That peaceful triumph was reserved for the reign of the Empress Anne. Under this Czarina, Münnich resumed his career as a soldier, and became the greatest general that Russia possessed at that period. Indeed, there were military men in other countries, who did not hesitate to place him in the same rank as Prince Eugène and Marlborough.

By this time Münnich had gained the bâton of a Field Marshal, and had recently led the Russian armies to victory over both the Turks and the Tartars. He had defeated the renowned Seraskier, Vely Bashaw ; had passed the Pruth under the fire of the enemy ; and had forced the skilfully-designed and well-defended lines of Perecop.

He was very handsome, had great dignity of presence, and a commanding stature. During his severest campaigns, he had shared the fatigues

and the privations of the common soldiers ; and had shown a hardihood that surpassed their own.

Like many great commanders, Münnich was haunted and deluded by the idea that his genius was as potent in civil as in military affairs. One qualification, held in those times to be very needful for statesmanship, he certainly did possess—a wonderful power of dissimulation. But he was too changeful a man to pursue, for any lengthened period, great designs of policy ; and his habits of military command sometimes prevented judicious management on his part, either of his colleagues, or of his subordinates in civil life. He was shrewd, brave, witty, resolute, and very fertile in resource. His chief failing was a certain restless impatience ; and this was discernible in his mobile countenance and in his eager, demonstrative gestures.

As the Field Marshal entered the room, the Private Secretary, Ivan de Biron, rose to leave it. Before he could do so, the Duke said to him in a marked manner, “ I shall want to have an answer to the question which I asked just now. You may go.”

Ivan bowed, and withdrew.

BOOK I.



CHAPTER II.

INTERVIEW BETWEEN BIRON AND MÜNNICH.

THE two great personages, who principally ruled Russia at this moment, were thus face to face. There was a third potentate, the Grand Chamberlain, Count Ostermann; but he ruled men from his sick chamber which he rarely left. On every great occasion, whenever there was a crisis in the fortunes of the Russian Court or Empire, Count Ostermann was suddenly seized with a fresh accession of illness. This would increase to absolute prostration, rendering him totally unable to be present when dangerous questions were before the Council of State, and when compromising papers had to be signed by the councillors.

The Regent received the Field Marshal with the utmost graciousness of manner. Had not this devoted friend urged upon the Regent to take the Regency as a solemn duty to his adopted country, Russia; and had not Münnich even knelt or offered to do so, in order to persuade him?

The shrewd Ambassador, who at that time represented England at the Court of St. Petersburg, had, in his despatch of the 21st of October, given his Government a description of the scene, in the course of which description, he hinted that Biron's reluctance to accept the Regency was like the unwillingness of an ecclesiastic to accept a bishopric, and it might be summed up in the words *nolo episcopari*. On the other hand, there is good reason for thinking that Biron did not accept this great office without some reluctance, foreseeing the possibility of much danger to himself. Up to this time, however, everything had gone most prosperously with the new Regent.

The Field Marshal responded to the gracious manner of the Regent by an air of obsequious deference and affection. There is no doubt, though, that these two confederates, who had practically made the will for the dying Empress—a will which she had signed reluctantly, fully appreciating the danger for her favourite—were not such good friends as they had been a few days before. They had not exactly quarrelled over the spoil; but their interests were beginning to diverge. The Regent, who had spies everywhere, knew that the Field Marshal paid frequent visits—visits not always mentioned to him by his friend—to the Winter Palace, where the father and mother of the infant Emperor resided with the child. As was natural, their views and wishes were adverse to the Regent's; and, doubtless, the mother of the infant Emperor, the Grand Duchess of Brunswick, thought that the Regency should have been entrusted to her.

The two statesmen had a long conference.

At first, they talked of matters in which they were jointly concerned, such as the instructions to be given to the Regent's representatives at foreign Courts, and the distribution of various offices which were vacant, or were to be made vacant.

The Regent, in his most subdued and gentle manner, changed the topic of the conversation.

"And now, Duke," he said, "about your own affairs?"

"Your Highness," replied Münnich, "honours me with a title to which I have no claim."

"Yes, I forgot," rejoined the Regent; "but you will see why the word was in my mind. And," he added smiling, "it has sometimes, I think, been in yours. At least it ought to have been; for I do not know of any one who has such claims to the Dukedom of the Ukraine as yourself. I spoke to the late Empress more than once about it. You are not a mere soldier, however great in that capacity—forgive a civilian for thinking that even a renowned general may be a mere soldier—but you would govern that recent conquest, so that it would be a real accession to the Empire. I am sure of that."

This appeal to the vanity of the Field Marshal was not, for the moment, without some effect; but he thought to himself that if the Regent had but spoken to the late Empress favourably, both the title and the appanage of the Ukraine would long ago have been conceded to him. It was true that they had been distinct and expressed objects of his ambition.

"This may be a subject," he replied, "for further consideration, and a mark of your Highness's favour at some future period. At present—"

The Regent interrupted him, and said, "That was exactly, Münnich, what I was coming to. The Grand Duchess and her silly little husband may object now; but I have news to tell you of a matter, which, if made good use of, may ensure our object. There are disturbances on the south-eastern frontier. The hill tribes are in arms again; and these troubles have, in part, extended to the Ukraine; and will, no doubt, extend still further. I know it would not be worth while, even to assure the security of the Empire in that direction, for such a man as you are, to take the command in person of the operations there, but—"

Here the Field Marshal interrupted.

"No, certainly not."

"These disturbances, Münnich, are of more moment than may at first appear. Recollect that the death of the late Empress was almost sudden, and certainly was unexpected either by the Court physicians or myself. It finds us somewhat unprepared. Then the nomination of that infant to the throne, not that it could wisely have been otherwise, and the comparative feebleness of the Regency, which, as you know, my dear friend, you forced upon me, render any such outbreaks no slight matter.

"It is only a thing to laugh at, a playing of babies at conspiracy; but still, you know, one could not let it go on—I mean that idiocy of the Grand Duke's. Some day, Münnich, that little sinner may find accomplices of somewhat higher rank and more statecraft than the Court-coachman's buffoon, a young apprentice, and a waiter at an inn—three of the wise heads which his Highness took into his councils the other day, when he was minded a little to rebel.

Greater men than these might join him. Eh ! Münnich ? ”

During this somewhat long address, the Field Marshal had looked fixedly at the Regent, whose eyes had fallen beneath that steadfast gaze. There was afterwards silence for a minute or two ; and then the Field Marshal said slowly but emphatically,

“ I should be very reluctant to leave your Highness at this juncture. What you have just said confirms that feeling.”

“ There is no solid ground for fear as yet,” replied the Regent ; “ but there will be in the future. That insolent Scotchman, Keith, has addressed his soldiery in terms that bode no good to either of us. He will be true, forsooth, to his infant Czar, but does not condescend to recognize Our Regency, and will take no oath to us. You doubtless hate the man as I do.”

The Regent, as he said this, had quite lost his mellifluous tones of speech, but he regained them as he continued the conversation.

“ For the present, I can take care of myself, but I shall want all your aid, hereafter, to keep these Generals of division in order. Not to gain fresh laurels—that would be too absurd—but to effect our object, I think it would be wise for you to proceed at once to the frontier of the Ukraine. In a few brief months you will have composed these troubles, and have added fresh claims to honour and reward—fresh claims in a new reign, mark you. That pompous little potentate, the Duke of Brunswick, would claim for himself the title of Generalissimo ; but when you come back, there would be no doubt as to who should have supreme command over the armies and the fleets of Russia. And, in the meanwhile, the patent

for the Dukedom of the Ukraine could be made out for you on the news of your first success reaching us."

The Regent, as before indicated, was not a real proficient in the art of dissimulation—only a forward pupil. Certain nervous movements in his countenance betrayed his anxiety as to whether his purpose was concealed, and whether the restless Field Marshal would fall into the snare thus, with little adroitness, prepared for him. Count Münnich, on the contrary, was an accomplished dissembler. He appreciated the full danger of his position, and thoroughly understood the anxiety of the Regent to be well rid of him for the present. He finally, however, made no objection to the Regent's proposal. Further advices, he thought, might perhaps be waited for; and some preparation must be made; but no doubt his good friend was right. He did not deny that it had been his ambition, at one time of his life, to be named as Generalissimo; but now he thought the claims of the father of the Emperor were pre-eminent. All that he wished for, was the security of the Regency to his friend.

Before they parted, the Regent expressed his hope that the Field Marshal saw the Imperial family frequently and gave them good advice, as he was sure he would do. For his own part, the immense amount of pressing business which had devolved upon him in the last few days, had prevented his paying his respects as frequently to the great people at the Winter Palace as he could have wished.

"Moreover, I am not sure," he said, "that I should have been very welcome; for I have been obliged to read that foolish Duke some severe

lessons, which I have chiefly done by writing to the Grand Duchess."

The Field Marshal then took his leave, being honoured by a fraternal embrace from the Regent, as was the custom in that country at that time.

In an hour afterwards, Count Münnich was closeted with the Grand Duchess; this time having entered the Winter Palace in the disguise of a major's uniform.

BOOK I.



CHAPTER III.

THE REGENT'S MEDITATION AFTER MUNNICH'S
DEPARTURE — DESCRIPTION OF BIRON'S PLANS,
EDUCATION, AND AIMS.

THE Regent remained for some time absorbed in thought. No one looking at him now, could have imagined that this man had reached the highest pinnacle of fortune to which any subject could aspire. It is true that one of his schemes had been to gain the succession to the Empire for one of his own descendants by the intermarriage of his children with those of the Imperial family. The late Empress Anne, though dotingly attached to the Duke, and very subservient to him, for, as it is said, she had often knelt at his feet to dissuade him from his cruel prosecutions of real or supposed enemies, could not brook the idea of the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of a groom, inheriting the throne of Russia. In everything but that scheme, Biron had succeeded. The potent influence of Russia had given to this adventurer the Duchy of Cour-

land; and he had been, for some years, an independent and Sovereign Prince. And now, too, within the last few days, he had become, practically speaking, the Sovereign of Russia. There are few instances of a man, with such small claims for eminence, at least as regards birth or station, having risen to such a height of fortune. Vast revenues he already possessed, still greater revenues had been pressed upon him to support his dignity as Regent. He had entirely verified, and acted up to a saying which those who had been his friends at college remembered to have often heard him make use of,—namely, “*Il se faut pousser au monde,*” or, as it was expressed to those who did not know French, “*Man muss fein suchen, sich in der Welt empor zu bringen.*” But, as the person upon whose authority this saying of the young Biron is given, adds, “Fortune turns upon hinges” (*Das Glück ist angelbrund.*)

More wretched individuals might have been found in the Empire of Russia than its Regent, the Duke of Courland,—the miserable families, for instance, whom he had driven into exile in Siberia; but, probably, at that moment, there was not one human being in that huge Empire whose soul was more shaken and disordered by fears, doubts, suspicions, and apprehensions, than that of the Sovereign Minister.

It is a fond fashion of the world, and it is a comfort to most men’s vanity, to make out that those whom they call the favourites of fortune, owe all to fortune, and little or nothing to merit. This is rarely the case, and certainly was not so with the Duke of Courland. On the accession of the late Empress, he was merely her Chamberlain, a personal favourite; but he distinctly foresaw,

that the government of the Empire would fall into his hands. And he prepared himself for it. Abstaining for two years from all direct interference with public affairs, he devoted himself to those studies which should fit him for a statesman. Though of mean extraction, he had been educated at Königsberg; and so careful a thinker could not fail to apply some of the knowledge which he had acquired at that seat of learning. He had always been a lover of books, and had formed one of the greatest and most valuable libraries collected by any private person during that century. Moreover, he had favoured learned men, and had sought companionship with them. It is not improbable, that, at this moment of his career, the fate of Sejanus was present to his mind, and he was well aware that if he should fall, it would afford the keenest delight to the people whom, according to the measure of his intelligence, he had faithfully served, whose material interests he had carefully maintained and improved, but over whom he had tyrannized with inflexible severity, looking upon his enemies as the enemies of the State.

After a long meditation, the Regent sprang from his seat suddenly, saying to himself, "I will see whether the piquets are stationed in the streets at the points where I ordered them to be; and, perhaps, I may hear what my good people are pleased to say of their Regent."

"Ivan."

At his master's call, the Secretary entered.

"What regiment is it?"

The Secretary told him.

"A faithful set of fellows," said the Regent, in his most mellifluous tones. "We could trust them to guard our State prisoners at Schlüssel-

berg, I think. Inform the Minister of War that their services will be required at that fortress, and that one of the regiments, now stationed there, may return.

“Good fellows, excellent fellows, Ivan, but noisy.”

BOOK I.



CHAPTER IV.

THE GYPSIES—THE REGENT IN DISGUISE HEARS HIS
FORTUNE—SONGS.

OF all the inhabitants of the great Empire of Russia, if indeed, we can call nomads inhabitants, the gypsies led at that time the happiest life. No statesman, even when most suspicious, connected them with any Court intrigue. They wandered about from province to province, living well upon the fears and hopes of the most credulous persons of a most superstitious and credulous community; and, with a view to gain some groundwork for their wizard skill, the gypsies took care to be well acquainted with the secret history of all that was going on.

The celebrated Russian poet Poushkin has given a vivid description of gypsy life :—

“ An unruly band of gypsies ” (so the poem commences)
wander through Bessarabia,

They pass the night beneath coarse tents close to the river
side,

Such a night's lodging is as sweet as liberty itself,
The carts and kibitkas have carpet-covered hoods ;

Between the wheels, burn fires,
Around which each family prepares its supper.
The horses are grazing in the field,
A tame bear lies free behind the carts,
All is life and freedom."

He afterwards describes their journey the next morning.

"The asses bear the playful children in their panniers :
Husbands, brothers, wives, and maidens follow.
What screaming and riot !
The songs of the gypsies, and the roaring of the bear impatiently rattling his chain ;
The variety of the coloured rags, the half nakedness of the children,
The barking and howling of the dogs,
The noise of the bag-pipes, and the rattling of the carts,
All is poverty, wildness, and confusion,
But full of movement and life.
What a contrast to our dead effeminacy,
To that frivolous and idle life of ours—
A life monotonous as the songs of slaves !"*

At this eventful period in Russian history, an unusual number of gypsies were in St. Petersburg. Any change of surrounding circumstances is favourable to these people ; and it was known to them, even before it was surmised by the great personages at Court, that the Empress Anne's disorder was a mortal one. Little else that had since occurred, whether amongst the populace or at Court, had escaped their attention and their unbounded curiosity.

On the evening of that day, in the early part of which the Regent and the Field Marshal had held a conference, fated to have so great an influence on the fortunes of both of them, a troop of these, gypsies were singing their songs, and telling for-

* "The Russians at Home," Sutherland Edwards.

tunes, in the "Italian Garden," (what a misnomer!) at the eastern end of the town. It was becoming dusk, but there was still light enough to discern the countenances of those who approached to have their fortunes told.

The Russians are a most musical people, destined, as some think, to succeed to the inheritance of the Germans in the musical expression both of the tenderest and the most sublime ideas.

The gypsies had accommodated themselves to the tastes of the people amongst whom they dwelt, and had not failed, when in Russia, to cultivate their musical powers to the utmost.

They now sang a song of a mournful character, which was a great favourite with the Russians. The following is a prose version; but the full effect of the words can hardly be appreciated except by one who has traversed the vast forests of some northern climate, and is familiar with the phenomenon which the song describes.

There is a sound in the forest.

It is not the weary waving of the branches storm-swept;

It is not the hurrying to and fro of the brown autumn leaves;

It is not the far-off howling of the wild beasts of the forest;

It is not the humming of the little things with many eyes and feet.

It is not the music of the birds when they meet in their groves, contending in song.

It is the great imprisoned spirit of the wood,

He ever and ever moans, until he can mingle with the free spirits of the upper air;

Ever and ever,

Ever and ever he moans,

After the song had ended, and the chief of the band of gypsies had announced that the decrees

of fate would now be told to any one who had the courage and the wisdom to listen to them, several claimants stepped forward to enjoy this high privilege of learning, not only their own fortunes, but the fortune of the world in which they lived. For in no lesser pride of prophetic knowledge had the chief of the gypsies announced their high claim to distinct intelligence of the unknown future.

Among the claimants who thus came forward, were several young men. It is probable that the wide knowledge of human affairs which had been promised, did not possess so much interest for them as their own peculiar fortunes. The gypsy chief, by nodding to one of them, signified the choice he had made. This chosen one had somewhat of a grave and serious countenance, and there was a look of anxiety in it. Perhaps this was the reason why he was chosen, for nothing puzzles and perplexes a soothsayer more than having a vacant and inexpressive countenance to deal with. The young man in question had come forward reluctantly, and had even been pushed to the front by an elder man who was his companion.

The gypsy chief, after he had made his choice of the youth whose fortune was to be told, indicated by an imperious gesture that person of their tribe who was to tell it. This was a young girl who came out of the circle with somewhat of a shy manner, and advanced towards the young man with an uncertain and hesitating step, as if she loved not publicity of any kind.

As this maiden afterwards becomes a most important person in this story, it may be well to describe her appearance here. She was small in stature, and delicate in feature. Her complexion

resembled that of her swarthy companions, without being quite so dark as theirs ; but there was a great and singular difference from them in the colour of her hair and of her eyes. These were not dark. The hair was of the very deepest chestnut colour ; the eyes were of a colour for which there is no name, at any rate in our language. This is not to be wondered at ; for, in traversing the streets of any great capital for many hours in the course of any day, you will probably not meet with more than two or three persons whose eyes are of the colour sought to be described. The nearest approach to description which can be given of this colour is, that it is what you would imagine would be presented by a transparent grey with a dark colour behind it.

Altogether, the girl was most beautiful ; and the singularity of her appearance was not so marked as to detract from that beauty. She had an exquisitely formed hand and arm ; and this beauty had been but slightly marred by the hard toil which generally fell to the lot of the women of her tribe. Her name was Azra.

As she laid her small, brown plump hand in that of the young man ; and without looking at it, felt for the lines in it which were to instruct her so certainly about his future fortunes, he could not but notice the remarkable beauty of her features.

What she said to him was not heard by the bystanders. It spoke of a fair young lady (the young man smiled), not very fair ; indeed her eyes were dark, and she was proud, and he who loved her had many hopes and more fears. There was a line in his hand which betokened sorrow for this year ; but the line of victory was

so deep and strong that it must overcome all obstacles. There would be great rejoicings, and he was one who would have much cause to rejoice, on the next inundation but one of the Neva.

Her tale was told; but before the young man and the maiden parted, their eyes met, and there was an arch look in the gypsy girl's countenance and a gesture of her hands which were interpreted by the young man to mean, "All this I tell you much as I tell the rest of the youths: it is my trade and you may put what faith you like in my sayings. Mayhap there is some truth in them after all."

Thus Ivan de Biron construed the look, for he it was who, having as it seemed but little to do, had come out to have his fortune told. It was a day when most of the official persons in Russia would have been very glad to have been informed what was to happen to them, considering the critical state of political affairs.

There then stepped forward to have his fortune told, a person of a very different semblance from Ivan de Biron, though he had come with him as a companion. He was a man of middle height, with an expression of countenance half anxious, half contemptuous, who mockingly desired his fortune to be told. He was dressed in sober fashion, and looked like the steward of a great household, who had many servants to look after, and much wealth to regulate. He appeared to be endeavouring to look humble; but if he aimed at doing so, his aim signally failed.

The other persons who wished to have their fortunes told, gave way to him at once, and whispered to one another "that they were sure they should be knouted if they interfered with him."

Azra was about to take his hand, and to exercise the ordinary craft of gypsies, when there suddenly broke out a sort of choral song, the burden of which in the language of the gypsies was—"It is he, it is he; the ruler of horses and the ruler of men."

The chief made a signal to Azra to withdraw; and an aged gypsy woman was substituted in her stead. The seeming steward placed a gold piece in the old woman's hand. She led him aside while the gypsies continued their song. She looked into his hand and then into his eyes; and, in a familiar manner, which he shrank from, smoothed down his cheeks with her coarse wrinkled hands. Then, lifting up the forefinger of her left hand, she said, "I see a palace, and I see a hut; and the snow lies in heaps round that hut, and the snowy mountains are in the far distance; and there are bars to the windows of the hut; and the reindeer gallops by at night; and the wolves are hunting down their prey; and all is desolate and all is silent. The ghosts dance by moonlight on the plains before the hut; and a man looks out and sees them; and there is no peace for him, for they are the ghosts of those who were his enemies."

The steward smiled and said, "Ghosts, my mother, are feeble creatures, and a brave man mocks at them." And she replied, "There is one thing he cannot mock at, and that is night. The white-handed love the night; but let him beware of night." And then she shrieked out the words "Night, night, night," and the chorus of the gypsies took up the refrain.

The grave man withdrew from the crowd, and made his way homewards, alone, for he had given no sign to his companion to accompany

him, and the young man respectfully abstained from intruding his company upon the elder. That home was the Summer Palace ; and though he entered the building with a certain grave humility, as became a steward of the household, yet all the sentinels seemed to wish to present arms to him, and one of them did so, but his salute was not acknowledged. The seeming steward, when once he had entered the palace, walked through its corridors as if they belonged to him, and gained his chamber. When there, he had no rest, but kept constantly repeating to himself the words "night, night, night ;" and he said to himself, "They are a miserable people, these gypsies, but they know the secrets of men ; and the hearts of fools are wide open to them. In three days at furthest, Münnich shall leave St. Petersburg, and bestir himself to compose the troubles at the frontier."

BOOK I.



CHAPTER V.

MÜNNICH'S INTERVIEW WITH MANSTEIN—CHARACTER OF THE GRAND DUCHESS.

It was early on the day after the Field Marshal's interview with the Regent that he sent for his Adjutant-General, Manstein, whom he greeted in a very warm and cordial manner.

"Brother and comrade in arms," he said, "a glorious future is before us. The tribes on the south-eastern frontier are troublesome, and it will be our duty to compel them to obedience. My generals, who have so often led their divisions into victory, will now crown their noble efforts by bringing order and discipline into these rude tribes. I myself am to accompany the army, and thus to gain fresh laurels."

Manstein thought he knew his commander well. He had been for many years his favourite, and one of his most trusted officers. He knew full well the versatility of the man he had to deal with; but the present mood of the Field Marshal was one the like of which he had never known.

Münnich did not fail to recognize Manstein's astonishment and even disgust, but continued in the same strain, "What was the passing of the Pruth, what was our forcing the lines of Perekop, compared with the exploits that are now before us? It is true" (and here the Field Marshal sneered bitterly) "that the names of these barbarian leaders are not quite so well known to the world as that of the Seraskier Vely Bashaw; but the world's opinion of the greatness of exploits is not always a just one."

Here Manstein ventured to interpose, "I grant the need, my lord, of suppressing revolt wherever it may threaten; but could not one of your generals be entrusted with the enterprise. Must the Field Marshal, the first soldier in Russia, be there in person?"

"Why, Manstein, so the great man wills it. I hardly think, indeed, that if the Field Marshal were not to be there in person, our crafty Regent's mind would be so disturbed at these possible dangers on the frontier."

"But now, my lord, when all is unsettled, the Empire new, St. Petersburg itself so dubious in fidelity that there are piquets in the streets, and the city is almost in a state of siege—surely, your leaving the capital would be madness."

"Of course it would—madness as regards the safety of the child-Emperor and the Grand Duchess; but not so for the Regent. My trusted friend," said Münnich suddenly changing his tone, "this is the scheme of that man to remove me, and thus to be unchecked in power. Think you, for a moment, that I will yield to it?"

"Ah! now," said Manstein, "my commander speaks like himself."

"I marvel at my past folly," replied the Field

Marshal. "Who that has stood in the path of Courland has long remained to thwart him? The way to Siberia is whitened by the bones of his victims; but I will not be one of them.

"Do you think that I do not know the man? He has ever been my bitterest enemy; he robbed me of my house in former days; he kept me ever in the background at Court. When I asked for some reward for my great services from the late woman, was it his speech or hers? or if hers, surely prompted by him, that I should soon be asking to be made Grand Duke of Muscovy?"

Manstein could not help thinking that if his chief had all along discerned the Duke of Courland's implacable enmity against him, it was somewhat strange that he had lately taken so active a part in gaining for the Duke the Regency of Russia.

The Field Marshal seemed to have divined his thoughts, for he exclaimed with vehemence, "Write me down as the greatest fool in this Empire, worthy to have been summoned into council by his Highness of Brunswick with the coachman's buffoon, and Sergius the waiter; but I did think that the villain could not have done without me. We, too, Ostermann and I, have our spies, Manstein, and have heard how he has described us, even in the last three days,—'the sick fox, Ostermann; the featherheaded, vain butcher, Münnich.' Now, did I ever sacrifice a single man of my army needlessly?"

This accusation of being reckless of the lives of his soldiery was one often made against this great general, and it touched him nearly. He continued:—

"We will spring upon him, Manstein. By night we'll do it. See that the regiment on

guard at the Summer Palace is one devoted to us; our own if possible. There is to be a great banquet to-morrow. Watch him well, and if need be, we will strike the blow to-morrow night."

"But the Grand Duchess, my lord? Unless she joins us, it will be rebellion; and if all accounts be true, she is a weak, vacillating woman."

"Already, Manstein, she hates and fears him. The slights she has endured are such as have great weight with a woman's mind. I think I can persuade her: but if not, I will do the deed myself. Will you be with me?"

"Heart and hand, my lord, even to death."

The Field Marshal expressed his gratitude warmly to Manstein, and then dismissed him, saying that he himself must at once see the Grand Duchess. He had seen her yesterday, but only in the company of the Grand Duke, "a worthy little man," he added, "but a sieve which lets all the corn run through, while it retains the chaff most carefully. Tell him that you mean to change the fashion of your beard, it is a secret he will keep religiously: tell him that you mean to cross the river by night, and the next hour the camp followers of the army will know your intention."

The character of the Princess, with whom the Field Marshal was about to seek an interview, and upon whose decision so much depended at this moment, was one not difficult to delineate. Good-natured, indolent, averse from business, there was but little noteworthy in the character, except in one important respect. It is a great mistake, often made by men in the estimate of women, to suppose that they are incapable of

friendship, at least of the friendship which men have towards persons of their own sex. Now the Grand Duchess of Brunswick had a female friend named Juliana de Mengden, to whom she was passionately attached. The friendship of our own Queen Anne for Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, and afterwards for Mrs. Masham, was poor and feeble when compared with that of the Duchess of Brunswick for her favourite. To shut herself up for days together with her infant child and with her beloved Juliana, was her chief happiness in this life. Ulric Anthony, Duke of Brunswick, a man of much worth and not without military ability (in civil affairs very imprudent), had but little influence with his wife, and in vain endeavoured to counteract the influence of the favourite. It does not appear that Juliana de Mengden busied herself with State affairs any more than her mistress did; but her casual likings, or dislikings, had the greatest weight with the Duchess; and, at this crisis, the result probably depended more upon Juliana de Mengden than upon any other person. It seems probable from various circumstances that the lively, brilliant Field Marshal was rather pleasing to the favourite. Moreover, the families of Münnich and De Mengden were connected, the Field Marshal's eldest son having married one of Juliana's sisters.

BOOK I.



CHAPTER VI.

MUNNICH'S INTERVIEW WITH THE GRAND DUCHESS.

THE Field Marshal proceeded to the Winter Palace, and asked for an audience of the Grand Duchess, which was at once accorded to him. He found her there with her ladies, and with the infant Emperor in her arms. "Is it not beautiful?" she exclaimed, pointing to the dress of the child—"a gift from the maidens of St. Petersburg to their young Czar; and it is worthy of him."

The Marshal said that the dress was beautiful; but there was a coldness in his tone which did not escape the notice of the mother. "I do not think, my lord, that you like children; or perhaps it is, that the great Field Marshal is not to be touched by these vanities of dress, which you know, my lord, please a poor mother. At some future day, mayhap, you will be proud of him, when the young soldier, with his great general by his side, is reviewing those veterans whose noble deeds and whose fidelity have secured him the Empire."

The Marshal stepped forward till he approached the Grand Duchess closely, and then said in a low voice, "I greatly fear that I shall never see that day, or accompany that young soldier whom your Highness thus pictures to yourself as he should appear in future years. But I would speak alone with your Highness."

Hereupon the Grand Duchess gave a sign to the ladies, who, with the exception of Juliana de Mengden, withdrew.

"And now, Field Marshal," exclaimed the Duchess, "what was the meaning of your last mysterious speech? What evil fate threatens our darling?"

"Every day that passes over his Imperial Majesty's head, brings him nearer to the time when he will be in the way of one who has never failed to remove any human being that stood in his way. Why did he wish to have the custody of the child—I mean of his Imperial Majesty?"

"That I never will consent to, Münnich."

"I trust not, madam. Your Highness knows that man's ambition, and how he has sought to ally his base-born brood to the Imperial family. You cannot have forgotten the slights that were put upon you throughout the last reign. You cannot but see that your own just claims to the Regency were set aside for this man."

"I love him not," exclaimed the Duchess, "but I thought that the Field Marshal and the Regent were sworn friends. To be sure, you have not sung his praises so loudly during the last few days."

"I grieve to find," Münnich replied, apparently changing the subject, "that your Highness is so troubled about those hill tribes on the

south-eastern frontier. For my own part, I did not think they threatened the safety of the Empire."

"What tribes? What frontier? What does he mean, Juliana?"

"We have heard nothing about hill tribes or danger to the frontier," exclaimed the favourite.

"So then it is without having taken your Highness's pleasure, that the Regent is about to dismiss me—for I call it a dismissal—me and my best generals to defend this frontier, menaced only in his imagination. Is it thus that he begins his reign, veiled under the name of Regency? No word in Council, no orders from your Highness!"

"This is too audacious," said the Duchess.

"Indeed it is, madam."

"One by one, your Highness's faithful friends will thus be taken from you."

"But you shall not go to the frontier, Marshal."

"If not, the next thing that your Highness will hear of your faithful friend and servant, is, that he and all who love him are on the way to Siberia."

"But I shall speak to him myself."

"Speak to him!" (The Marshal smiled.)

Your Highness will but partake my fate, sooner or later, with a certainty."

"What then is to be done? Do you know, Juliana?"

The favourite, as thoroughly perplexed as her mistress, said nothing; but looked inquiringly at the Marshal.

"The fate he means for us, for all of us, for that dear child, for her (pointing to Juliana), for all who love your Highness—must be brought upon himself. And there is no time to lose, not a day, not an hour, scarcely a minute."

"I dare not do it, Münnich. How am I, a feeble woman, not versed in State affairs, to take upon myself this burden and this danger? Little as I know of this Empire—new to me—I know that the Regent's creatures hold every office, and that his will is law with them."

"They fear, but do not love him," Münnich replied. "Their idol, once thrown from its pedestal, would be dragged through the mud, to the joy of all beholders,—from the highest prince to the lowest peasant in Russia. Think of the thousands he has banished, and what a wealth of hatred surrounds him! But we waste our time in talking. Let me act. On me let the whole enterprise rest. The soldiery love me. I only ask your Highness's consent to the deed, and done it shall be."

"I cannot sanction it now; can I, Juliana? My husband, too—what will he say?"

The Duchess, in an agony of doubt, rose and walked with irresolute steps about the room. The imperial infant, not accustomed to such irregular movements, began to cry. "Leave me now, my good Münnich," the Duchess exclaimed. "We will talk further of this matter."

The Field Marshal saw that it was hopeless to gain a decision from the indecisive woman at this moment. He made his obeisance; and, giving a slight sign to the favourite, left the room. She followed him, and for some minutes they walked together up and down the western corridor. There was an earnest, whispered conversation between them, which was interrupted by the voice of the Grand Duchess calling for Juliana.

Count Münnich left the palace, and his thoughts, if they had been uttered in words,

would have been these: "She is the stronger of the two, or at least not the weaker. Were this Grand Duchess an Empress Catharine, or even an Empress Anne, it might not be needed. But what possible protection is there in her? It is doubly needful that the thing be done. I will go to Manstein. Let me see. It was the 9th Regiment of Dragoons amongst whom I slept for many nights in the camp on the Pruth. I think I know every man of them."

BOOK I.



CHAPTER VII.

BANQUET AT THE REGENT'S PALACE.

THE Regent had issued invitations for a great banquet to be held that day, at which, of course, his good friend the Field Marshal was to be an honoured guest.

The remaining hours of the day before the time when Count Münnich was to attend the banquet, were very actively employed by him. Not once did he look behind him, whether he went on foot or in his droschky, though he well knew that wherever he went, he was closely followed by the Regent's spies. But, with a feeling of desperation upon him, he considered that the chief danger now was, lest the swiftness of his preparations should not be adequate to the fixedness of his purpose. "Besides," he said to himself, with the shrewdness as regards minor matters that was characteristic of the man, "they will not make their reports until to-morrow morning; and then it may be too late to make them."

The hour for the banquet arrived. The pre-

parations for it were very magnificent. The one thing that delighted the Regent, that seemed to comfort his gloomy soul, and even to dispel its gloom, was splendour of all kinds. During the reign of the late Empress every extravagance in dress, decoration, and equipage, was carried to its utmost height. The polite and graceful French, great lovers of fitness in all things, were wont to smile at this barbaric splendour, which was often most incongruous. Even the ruder English mocked at it, as we learn from the despatches of our ambassador Mr. Finch, to our own Court. But still it had a certain magnificence; and the various nationalities welded into the great Russian Empire, with the corresponding variety of costume, equipage, and manner, added an appearance of romance to the scene which was wanting in the more uniform splendour of other Courts.

The Field Marshal, surrounded by a brilliant staff of officers, was received with especial honour by the Regent, who, indeed, advanced to the principal landing of the staircase to welcome his most honoured guest. It seemed to all the company as if these two great men, the pillars of the State, as the courtiers did not omit to call them, were knit together in the firmest bonds of friendship. But murder, or something very like it, was in the heart of each of them.

There is nothing so remarkable in man as his power of concealing mental torture. What is unsaid is ever nearest and greatest. The soul is beset by some hideous remorse—consuming care—warnings of disease—fear of death—rejected love—vile pecuniary distress—or the anguish of anticipated shame. The dark thing is not

merely in the back-ground: its presence never withdrawn, its grasp never wholly relaxed, it occupies the citadel of thoughts and feelings; and all that is beyond its sway, is but out-lying and unconsidered precincts. Meanwhile the man plays his part in society as other men do: is polite, gay, affable; and if he is really a strong and able person, is as much like his ordinary self, himself before this dark thing had any hold upon him, as it is possible to be.

Now Count Münnich had this power of fighting against and keeping under, the dire thoughts which occupied the fortress of his mind; but the Regent had not.

Great feasts are very much alike; and it needs not to recount at large the richness of the entertainment, and how, after dinner had ended, there were songs and dances which might remind one of the festivals of Roman Emperors. These festivities, however, came to an end. The less favoured guests retired, while the more favoured remained, or, as it seems, returned to enjoy the pleasure and the honour of a social evening of conversation in the presence of the Regent.

He, ever anxious, as the rest of the company thought, to do honour to his much-loved guest, the Field Marshal, led the conversation, in a royal manner, to the chief exploits of Münnich's military life.

The Count, delighted to have for a topic matters which he could discuss without any reference to present politics, was eager and earnest in the recital of his great adventures; nor did he forget to dwell upon the events of his early days, especially of his imprisonment in France, at Cambrai, where the excellent Fenelon

was so good and kind to him and to his fellow-prisoners. This was an era in his life to which the Field Marshal was very fond of recurring.

Meanwhile, the Regent, apparently exhausted by the fatigues of the day, was reclining on a couch with a little table before him. Suddenly, in the midst of one of the Field Marshal's most interesting narratives, the Regent interrupted him, saying, "By the way, Münnich, did you ever undertake any enterprise by night?"

Languidly up to this moment, had the Regent listened to the Marshal's rather boastful narrative, occasionally putting in the polite questions or remarks which a wearied host thinks it necessary to do, in order to show that he is not tired of his guests and of their conversation. But this time he half rose from his couch, leant on the table, and looked fixedly into the face of the Field Marshal.

The Field Marshal was certain that his conspiracy was discovered. He felt as we mostly feel in such great crises, all the powers of life flying to the centre, and as if utterance would be denied to us; but he was one of the bravest men that ever lived, and, as we have said, a perfect master of dissimulation.

In an easy manner he replied, "In the course of my time, I have been obliged to use every hour of the twenty-four for some great purpose. I do not particularly remember any signal adventure undertaken by night. All hours are alike to me, when I have my work to do;" and then he resumed his interesting narrative, which told of a military exploit that had brought him into direct conflict with the renowned Turkish General, the Seraskier.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEPARTURE OF THE GUESTS—THE REGENT'S CON- VERSATION WITH HIS SECRETARY IVAN.

As the last of his guests departed, the Regent gave a sigh of relief. For some time he remained alone, giving way to the deepest melancholy. At length he summoned Ivan, his private secretary. The young man was so impressed with the attitude and bearing of the Regent, that he ventured to address him first, a liberty he had seldom presumed to take.

"Is your Highness ill?"

"Not in the body, Ivan. But all day long a cloud of horror has surrounded me, and weighed me down—I never knew the like—and some presentiment of evil in an embodied form has been beside me at every moment. It sits by my side where I sit now."

"Oh! my Lord, 'tis but the weight of empire that oppresses you—not a single moment's quiet since the death of the Empress! The hour is late; will you not retire to rest?"

"I dread the night more than the day," replied the Regent. "Last night my dreams were horrible. The wolves that old hag talked about hunted me down; and each one bore a human face—some face I had known, some one that hated me. 'Tis an old fable, Ivan, that by some magic power you might see into the hearts and souls of other men. It is no fable. I had that power to-day. I saw into the souls of those that sat at meat with me; and who, at each pause, commenced a new song of praise to their all-powerful and all-wise Regent. But their hearts were full of malice, Ivan; and I read their minds as if they were an open book before me. Oh! how I wearied of the prate and flip-pant boasting of that soldier. But the man is harmless—for the present, harmless. There is but little danger from so vain a man. Nevertheless, he goes to the frontier. I will not have him near me."

Ivan's astonishment was great at this disclosure of the Regent's purposes, for the Duke was not a man given to confide in his private secretary. He did not venture to make any remark that would show that he had listened to his Highness's last words, and merely said,

"Will you not go to bed, my lord?"

"No; I will not. Come hither, Ivan; why do you stand at such a distance? Are you, too, afraid of me?"

Ivan moved a few paces nearer to his formidable master.

"Something I have done for Russia," said the Regent mournfully, "something to fulfil the schemes of that half-crazy, half-inspired man whom they call 'Peter the Great.' Come nearer, still, Ivan. One would think I was some wild

beast, whom all men fear would spring upon them. I dislike you less than I do most men. You shall for the nonce be the devil's advocate. Say what you can against the soul of Biron. What has he done, that all men should hate him? Speak out, boy; it shall not harm you. Tell what they say in the streets, and what they say in their innermost chambers, when my spies are not beside them."

An almost mortal terror seized upon poor Ivan. A great danger on either side beset him. If he should say what he thought, could he ever be forgiven by the Regent? If he did not say it, would so shrewd a man be satisfied with this reluctance and this reticence? He chose the bolder course; and falteringly spoke thus:—

"All Russia knows, your Highness, what you have done for it. Roads, bridges, cities, owe their existence to the Duke of Courland. This splendid Court reflects your love of splendour and your desire for civilization."

"I think, my good Ivan, that I have heard these words once or twice before—even as lately as from the slaves who sat at these tables and secretly wished that my food was poison. Have you nothing else to say?"

"Yes, I have. What has been the cost of all these benefits to Russia? How many thousands, not of common criminals, have died on their journey to Siberia, or are dying in those hideous wastes? They say, the people say, your Highness, and I—I say so too, 'Was it needful to purchase those benefits at this price?'"

"Defend me from the tender mercies of the young," exclaimed the Regent. "Had I but slain, by strictly legal or military slaughter, these thousands, I should have been guiltless in

your eyes, my tender-hearted Ivan. What ! you would have me scotch the serpents, and leave their brood to wriggle round me—their poisonous fangs undrawn ? No ! I have done wisely. Who thwarted me, thwarted my aims, which ever, for the good of this empire, were predominant ; and he who did so was an enemy to the State, and not to me alone. ‘ Not common criminals ! ’—as if they were not infinitely worse. They have become useful colonists instead of harmful conspirators. This touches me not—say on.”

“ Well, then, your Highness has provoked the envy of the nobles by your magnificence. They point at your palaces ; they join with those of Courland, and accuse you of private ambition.”

“ And think you, my good youth, that a simple citizen who bore himself humbly, and lived like some poor Boyard from the provinces, would have been feared or respected by these barbarians ? Go, go. You are honest, and I like you the better for what you have said ; but you speak with your wisdom of three-and-twenty years, and you know not the world in which we live.

“ But stay, what are the orders to the guard ? ”

“ That they do not parley with any one who seeks an entrance to the palace by night, but that they cut him down forthwith.”

“ Are the sentinels doubled ? ”

“ They are, your Highness.”

“ Not that I fear. It was a dream though that Cæsar had before they slaughtered him in the Senate. And so they only told you, those gypsies, of some girl you were to marry ; some rustic girl, I think, you said, Ivan—the never-ending trash with which they tickle fools ; but

to me (for grey hairs—prematurely grey—demand another story) they spoke of wolves, of nightly wolves. Some danger they must ever threaten, and it is safe to prophesy misfortune to any of the sons of men. If I, too, were a prophet or a gypsy, I should foretell misfortune as the surest thing to happen. Marriage to you, my boy, and the wolves to me, as being somewhat older and wiser. Oh! they know how to suit us all.” (And here the Regent laughed loudly, but not for long.) “They knew me though—the wretches—they knew me. And many things they know. Go now. I like you, and I can trust you. We will to-morrow make out the powers for the Field Marshal; those for him and his generals at the frontier. That Manstein has a look I do not like—a faithful fellow too—one that would wade through blood to do his master’s bidding. Good night, Ivan; dream of the fair rustic beauty whom the gypsies promised you, good night.”

Ivan left the room with an uneasy feeling, that he should never be forgiven for the audacious truths he had uttered that night. But still he felt a certain gladness that he had for once said out fully and boldly what he had long thought, and long desired to say.

The Regent had not been many minutes alone, when a servant entered the room, and said, “Herr Litmann wishes to see your Highness.”

“At this hour, Fritz? I have seen the man once before to-day.”

“I told him, my lord, that your Highness could not see him; but he said, that even if the Regent were in bed, he must see him; and he won’t go away.”

"Admit him."

The servant left the room.

"When will this weary day close? It has been the longest day of my life, and the dreariest."

Herr Litmann was the great Jew banker of the Court. His interests were closely allied with those of the Regent; and in his hands vast sums had been deposited by the Duke. Before dinner Herr Litmann had been closeted with the Regent, and had informed him that there was a plot against his government, and even against his life. The Archbishop of Novogorod had preceded Litmann earlier in the day; and he, too, had come to give the Regent information of the conspiracy.

Herr Litmann entered. He was evidently in a state of great agitation. Being a stout unwieldy man, and having hurried up the stairs, he was almost breathless, and gasped out his first sentences.

"It's all true. There's not a moment to be lost. I'm certain of it. He was with the Duchess again in the forenoon — disguised. Why disguised? You don't know that man. That fool, too, her husband, has been talking again, most insolently, of your Highness. The people murmur in the streets."

"That is no new thing, my good Litmann. This excellent people always have murmured in the streets, ever since I have known them. Why man, the Empress is not yet buried; and all the thought, if thought it can be called, which the Grand Duchess can command, is given to that ceremonial, and to her place in it. The day after to-morrow, Münnich goes to the frontier. It is all settled. I have provided for it. I take at least as much care for my life, Litmann, as you for your roubles."

“By the god of my fathers, your care will be too late.”

The Regent drew himself up haughtily, and said, “Herr Litmann, you are a shrewd man, and money grows in your hands; but I am not aware that you have had much to do with the government of human beings, unless it be your own clerks. Allow me to do my work, and to know how it should be done.”

The astute Jew perceived that any further effort on his part was hopeless. He said not another word, but rushed from the room abruptly, without even a parting salutation. The Duke was, in his eyes, a doomed man, whom it was scarcely worth while to consider any more. Herr Litmann spent the remainder of that night in concealing what jewels and specie he thought he could venture to hide away, while still leaving large portions of his wealth unconcealed. He was almost minded to seek safety in flight; but, as there was a considerable amount of his property which he could not carry with him, the chain between that property and him was too strong to be broken at a moment's notice.

The Regent was again left alone. “Jews, gypsies, archbishops—all of them have their special avenues of information. Rascality reaches them by separate roads. What they say, is true. I needed not their information; I saw the danger myself; but it is a long way from the frontier to St. Petersburg. Münnich may scheme there. That Scotchman, Keith, may scheme elsewhere: there are other generals who are mine. I am not a Cromwell to go to bed in armour, change my room from night to night, and try to deceive my own guards as to my whereabouts. I may be a tyrant. I don't dis-

like that boy for telling me so; but at least, I am not a coward."*

The Regent remained for some time buried in thought, and then retired to his chamber.

* It appears that the stories about Cromwell, much exaggerated, were still rife on the Continent; and the Regent's conduct, on this occasion, was contrasted with that of Cromwell.

BOOK I.



CHAPTER IX.

RESULT OF THE CONSPIRACY.

IVAN had spoken to his master of the lateness of the hour ; but it was not what we should call late, seeing that it was but eleven o'clock when the last of the Regent's guests departed. This, however, was a very late hour at a period when great feasts were held at two o'clock in the day.

The Field Marshal, well aware that the Regent's spies were everywhere, and that some of them were, perhaps, members of his own household, drove home to his palace, and went at once to bed. But little sleep, as he afterwards said, had he that night. Indeed there is as little hope of sleep for the framers of a conspiracy, on the eve of its outbreak, as for affianced brides the night before their marriage.

At two o'clock in the morning Münnich rose, and sent for his aid-de-camp, Colonel Manstein, whom he had apprised that he should want his services very early in the morning. It may be

conjectured that Marshal Münnich had not made up his mind, before he went to bed, at what time he should commence his enterprise, otherwise he would have told Manstein that he should want him in the middle of the night. Probably, as Münnich lay tossing on his bed in anxious thought, each moment's delay in the commencement of that enterprise seemed doubly hazardous to him. An additional reason for supposing that he had not finally decided upon the exact time of action, may be deduced from the fact that he had made no arrangement for a further interview with the Grand Duchess. Probably that pregnant question asked by the Regent, and his manner of asking it, decided any doubts that still remained in the Field Marshal's mind.

The enterprise, indeed, if undertaken at this moment, was certainly most hazardous. To make his way by night into the Winter Palace, where the Grand Duchess dwelt, was alone a matter of great difficulty, and he did not dare to take the final step without her acquiescence, however wrung from her. The state of insecurity at that time was such, that the palaces of the grandees of Russia were most strictly guarded; and both at the Winter Palace and the Summer Palace, there were not only sentinels at every entrance, but there were piquets, consisting of forty men, posted in front of these palaces. If but one of these guards were to do his duty and to give the alarm, the attempt would be frustrated; and failure in such an enterprise was certain death for the conspirators.

Manstein came, and the Field Marshal drove with him in a coach to the Winter Palace.

Their forethought in having arranged that the regiment on duty should be one devoted to them, and of which indeed the Field Marshal was Colonel, was most serviceable. They were allowed to pass, rather to the private disgust of the severe disciplinarian, Manstein. The Field Marshal knew his way about the palace, and he made at once for the bed-room of the Grand Duke and Duchess. In the ante-chamber the favourite, Juliana de Mengden, was sleeping. Münnich awoke her; and, after some parley, persuaded her to awake the royal pair, who were sleeping in the next room. It was the Grand Duchess alone who came out to see him. We may reasonably conjecture, for it was never known, that the Grand Duke did not partake the views and wishes of his wife, and at any rate wished to keep himself free from responsibility. Strange to say, the irresolution of the Duchess seemed to have vanished. Their conference was but brief; and, at the end of it, the Marshal ordered Manstein to summon all the officers who were on guard at the Palace.

Her Highness made a short speech to the assembled officers, recounting the injuries which the Imperial family had suffered from the Regent; declaring that it was impossible for her any longer to endure his conduct; and stating, that she was determined to have him apprehended. To Marshal Münnich she had committed the duty of seizing the person of the Regent; and she trusted that these officers would implicitly obey the Marshal's orders. They made no difficulty whatever as regards obeying the Grand Duchess's commands. Whereupon she gave them her hand to kiss, and they went downstairs with the Marshal, who got the guard under arms.

The men were ordered to load their muskets. An officer, with some of the rank and file, was left on guard with the colours. The remainder of the men went with Münnich to the Summer Palace. This body halted at a short distance from the building. Then the Marshal sent Manstein alone to the piquet which was stationed in front of the Palace. Manstein told them the whole story, and that the Field Marshal had received the Grand Duchess's orders to seize the Regent.

In this vast Empire it is probable that the Regent had no real friend. The officers and men of this piquet—his own guard—made no more objection to the proposal than the Grand Duchess's men had made. In short, they said that they were ready to give their assistance, if it was necessary, in seizing the Regent.

Manstein returned to the Field Marshal with these good tidings. He was then ordered to put himself with an officer at the head of twenty men, to enter the Palace, and capture the Regent; and, in case he made any resistance, to put him to death.

Manstein entered the Palace alone, leaving the soldiers at the entrance. The sentinels allowed him to pass in without any address on his part to them, for they fancied that he had come, as a friend to the Regent, upon some matter of urgent importance. But after he had entered the palace, he was extremely embarrassed as to which way to take. Soon he came upon some servants, who were waiting in an ante-chamber; but, being desirous of avoiding all suspicion, he walked on as if he knew the way to the Regent's room. After he had passed through this ante-chamber, he went through two other rooms

which were vacant. Then he came to some folding-doors. These were locked, but fortunately for him, the servants had neglected to fasten them by sliding the bolts at the top and the bottom, so that he easily forced the doors open.

Upon what minute circumstances do the greatest events depend! For, if the Regent had escaped, the fear of men would have furnished him with a party to uphold his legal right; and, at the least, a great civil war might have been the result of this conspiracy.

When Manstein had forced these doors, he found that he had entered the chamber where the Regent and his wife were lying. Biron's sleep, after that day of fearful anxiety, was so profound that not even the noise which Manstein had made in forcing open the doors had awakened him. His wife, too, slept soundly. Manstein undrew the curtain, and desired to speak with the Regent. Thereupon, both husband and wife started up in surprise, and began to clamour for assistance, "judging rightly enough that this intruder had not come to bring them any good news."* The Regent sprang from the bed. Manstein threw himself upon him, and held him tightly until the guards came in. It is evident that some of the soldiers must have followed upon Manstein's steps. The Regent, a powerful man, dealt Manstein and the soldiers some hard blows with his fist. They struck at him with the butt-ends of their muskets. At length, throwing him down on the floor, they gagged him with a handkerchief, bound his hands with an officer's sash, took him to the

* Manstein's 'Memoirs of Russia.'

guard-room, where they covered him with a soldier's cloak, and then conveyed him in the Marshal's coach as a prisoner to the Winter Palace.

While the soldiers were struggling with the Regent, his Duchess had got out of bed and had followed him into the street, when a soldier took her in his arms, and asked Manstein what he should do with her. He bade him carry her back to her chamber; but the soldier not caring, it seems, to take this trouble, threw her down on the ground in the midst of the snow, and there left her. The captain of the guard, finding her in this piteous condition, had some clothes brought to her, and re-conducted her to the apartment she had occupied.

The Regent's brother and other of his relatives and adherents were also seized that night.

The Regent was not allowed shelter in the Winter Palace. Miserably clad as he was, and exposed to the snow which was then falling, he was kept standing at the door, where he was subjected to the insults of the people, for it was now morning. At last, some hours afterwards, he and his Duchess were put into an open carriage to be conveyed to Schlüsselberg, a journey of about thirty miles. There was, moreover, a fearful addition to his sufferings. Companions were provided for him on that journey, the very sight of whom must have caused anguish to his soul. Hastily there were collected from the prisons about thirty State prisoners, all of whom could reproach him for their imprisonment. Nor did they fail to do so. Some of them must have been with him in one of the large and lumbering coaches or waggons which were provided

for the conveyance of prisoners. Andrew Jacowitz, State Councillor and Cabinet Secretary, lately condemned by the Regent, was now one of his companions in misery. This poor man had been so severely knouted that he was injured for life.

In this sorry fashion, and with such friends and companions, did the delicately-nurtured Regent pursue his weary way to that fortress to which his signature had sent so many other wretched beings, and which he could not reach before midnight.

Ivan de Biron was also one of this mournful cavalcade; and, as the Regent's private secretary, had to listen to the reproaches and curses which were heaped upon him, being naturally supposed to be nearly as guilty as his master.

The feelings of the Grand Duchess during the three or four hours that elapsed between the time of her speech to the officers, and the return of Münnich with his prisoner, must have been very grievous and anxious. The slightest noise in the streets made her heart beat with fear. It might announce, not the return of Münnich, but the approach of the revengeful Biron, who, after the failure of such an enterprise, would no longer hesitate to lay violent hands not only upon her Imperial self, but upon her darling child and her beloved favourite. She must have known full well, that by consenting to Münnich's scheme, she had risked the reign, if not the life, of a child who might hereafter justly reproach his mother for placing all their fortunes in such hazard.

On the following morning, all the regiments that were at St. Petersburg were ordered to assemble around the palace. The Grand Duchess then declared herself Regent of the Empire

during the minority of the Emperor. She, at the same time, put on the Collar of the Order of St. Andrew; and every one took a new oath of fidelity, in which the Grand Duchess was mentioned by name, as had not been done in that imposed by the Regent. There were none that did not make great demonstrations of joy at seeing themselves delivered from the severity of Biron. From that moment everything was quiet. Even the piquets were taken away, which the Duke of Courland had posted in the streets, to prevent commotions during his regency. And yet there were some shrewd persons, who, though rejoicing at this great event, prognosticated that it would not be the last of its kind; and that those who had been the most active in bringing it about, would be the first that would be the victims of another revolution.

After an examination of the prisoners, which, in the Duke of Courland's case, took place at the fortress of Schlüsselberg, he and his adherents were banished to Siberia. Among them was General Bismarck, a brother-in-law of the Regent.

The obsequies of the defunct Empress were then celebrated with great pomp. It is remarkable that these occurrences should have taken place in the short time that elapsed between the death of the Empress and her funeral. So soon was it that her prophecy of evil for her favourite, on his assumption of the regency, was to be fulfilled.

The conspiracy, of which the issue has just been narrated, was of so remarkable a character that it deserves to have a few comments made upon it.

The course of conspiracies is wont to be

singularly uniform. The previous transactions mostly occupy much time; and day by day, or at least, week by week, some new person is introduced into the plot. The aids and appliances thought to be necessary, tend to become far too elaborate, each new appliance brings in a fresh element for possible detection. Happily, too, for mankind, their habitual faithlessness serves them in this instance. Eventually there is nearly sure to be some person, who, actuated by fear, by the hope of favour, or by pity, becomes the traitor, and either directly, or by some pregnant hint, betrays the plot. So it happens that a very small percentage of projects of this kind succeeds.

Never was there a conspiracy so swiftly formed, so swiftly matured, so swiftly betrayed, and so swiftly executed, as this conspiracy against the powerful Duke of Courland.

The state of Russian society is also indicated, by the remarkable manner in which a knowledge of the plot must have spread through the capital.

In an incredibly short time, a conspiracy known at first to the Field Marshal only and a few important personages, is so widely bruited about, that Christian prelates (for other great dignitaries of the Church, besides the Archbishop of Novogorod, had called upon the Regent and had given him information), and also the Jew banker Litmann, were, it appears, thoroughly versed in what was going on. That it was to be an undertaking by night, and that the Regent had divined this, is almost certain from the alarming question which he put to the Field Marshal in the presence of Manstein and others who have recorded this most interesting circumstance.

The Regent, throughout these proceedings, is little to be blamed. With his vast knowledge of conspiracies, even if he believed in the existence of this one, it was but in accordance with his experience, that it should take time to come to maturity ; and he never imagined that any overt act would take place before the ceremonies of the late Empress's funeral should have been solemnized. The character of Count Münnich, imperfectly read by the Regent, did not allow him to believe that this gay, talkative, restless, brilliant man, could act with the speed and force of a dark-souled and determined conspirator.

The Grand Vizier, when the news was brought to Constantinople of the downfall of the Regent, made the following remark, "So then this Russian Regent has met with a still harder fate than has fallen to the lot of scarcely any of my predecessors." It seems as if the Grand Vizier abhorred exile more than death.

Ovid tells us, meaning to show forth the full misery of exile, how his feet, sympathizing with his soul, almost refused to quit the threshold.

*Ter limen tetigi ; ter sum revocatus : et ipse,
Indulgens animo, pes mihi tardus erat.*

No lingering of this kind was allowed to the unhappy Regent of Russia. He went to sleep, a Sovereign Prince, and an all-powerful prime minister : he awoke, to find himself at once, as it may be said, a prisoner and an exile.

BOOK II.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER I.

IVAN AND THE PRINCESS MARIE.

ON the fall of the Regent there were doubtless many persons in St. Petersburg who, in their rude way, felt and thought what one of the greatest of Latin poets has expressed in a passage almost unrivalled for force and beauty.

A certain Rufinus was the prime minister of the Emperor Theodosius, and was as hateful to the Roman people as the Duke of Courland had been to the Russian people—and far more justly hateful.

The poet Claudian says that his dubious mind had often been drawn this way and that, thinking whether the gods cared for mankind, whether there was any ruler of the world, or whether mortal affairs flowed on with undirected course. When he beheld the strictness and the beauty of the laws of nature—the sea contained within its prescribed bounds—the invariable recurrence of the seasons, the succession of night to day—then he thought that all things were governed by the counsels of

God. On the other hand, when he looked at human affairs involved in such darkness, the wicked flourishing, the pious tormented, then his religion glided away from him. He thought the world was ruled by chance, not by design; that there were either no deities, or that they took no heed of mortal men. At length, Rufinus fell. His fate appeased this tumult of contending thoughts in the poet's mind, and absolved the gods.

Abstulit hunc tandem Rufini pœna tumultum,
Absolvitque Deos.

There must have been those in Russia who felt that their hard thoughts of Providence were now removed, now that the tyrant Biron had been hurled from power. The state of siege in which the city had been kept was set aside; the spies were dumbfounded for the moment; the people breathed again.

The course of this narrative does not allow the reader to follow in detail the events which took place in the capital on the deposition of the Regent. The scene is at once changed to a distant region.

The time was evening; the place was a small town in Siberia, named Pelem; and the season of the year was spring. The word town, however, is a very dignified name to give to the miserable wooden hovels which were clustered together at small distances from each other.

It must not be supposed that Siberia is a country wholly devoid of great natural beauty and of great natural fertility. Indeed, there are parts of Siberia which rival, if not excel, the grandest scenery in Switzerland. But at this

season of the year, and in this region, the landscape had a most depressing appearance.

Almost everywhere throughout the world that season is odious, with its sunshine like the smile of a false man, and its bright bitterness far more intolerable than the downright gloom of honest old November. But, in Siberia, the treacherous time of spring presents its worst and most repulsive aspect.

The snow had begun to melt, and tufts of scanty herbage were here and there beginning to make their appearance. In the far distance there were snowy mountains still retaining all their beauty. These, however, were scarcely visible, for a thick dark mist was creeping up, and partially obscured them. In and around the town the snow was trodden down; and all nature had that aspect of a transition state which in such regions is most deplorable and most depressing.

Two buildings alone in this town stood out as superior to the rest. One was the church, the colour of which would have attracted the notice of any person on first entering the town, as it presented an appearance so different from the dim tints which the surrounding wooden houses had acquired. Outside it was whitewashed, and gaudily ornamented with various devices in blue and red colouring. Its roof was of some metallic substance, which glittered in midday; and which, even now, shone meteor-like above the mist. It was lighted up, and was prepared for evening service.

The other building, though constructed of wood like the rest of the dwellings, was of two stories, and was surrounded by palisades. No light was visible in it, for the windows were so designed as to look into a small courtyard at the rear of the house. Two persons, already known in this story,

inhabited that building. One of them was a young man of frank and engaging manners, who was on friendly terms with all the other exiles ; the other was a man of mature age, who, though he had been for some months a resident in that town, had never been seen in daylight, face to face, by any of its inhabitants. Sometimes he had been seen at midnight walking on the flat roof of this house ; and, if it were a darker evening than usual when the cattle came back to the town, he would then, closely muffled, make his appearance on the roof. This seemed to be his only pleasure, as it was to another remarkable person, who, at a future period, occupied the same house, of which circumstance there is a tradition that has come down to the present day.

The present occupants of the house were Ernest de Biron, Duke of Courland, the late Regent of Russia, and his secretary, Ivan de Biron.

At the northern end of the town, and almost in its precincts, was a large forest. At the time described, a young girl, in peasant dress, had brought her burthen of felled wood to the extremity of the forest near the town. There was no one in that small community to whom the pleasant sights and sounds which belong to a forest were more soothing and more acceptable than to that maiden.

In all climes a forest is perhaps the most beautiful, and at any rate the most gracious product of nature, but in Siberia it has an especial pre-eminence ; and, very significantly, the inhabitants of that dreary region have adopted the tree as a sacred symbol.

Each of the senses, sound, sight, and smell, must

be delighted by the gratification it receives in a Siberian forest. Variety of colours, infinite play of light and shade, diversity of odours—not omitting the rich, wholesome odour of the pine, and that low murmuring noise which prevents solitude, yet scarcely hinders silence—are all to be met with there.

Then, too, there is something to be seen which aptly reminds one of human life. In the forest the individual tree, as in the crowded city the individual human being, is often dwarfed, stunted, and controlled in its existence by its immediate neighbours; but yet it inclines forward and pushes forth its branches towards every inlet of air and light that it can possibly attain to. This gives that variety of form which is so delightful to the lover of nature. There is the tree which, from the near oppression of its neighbour, becomes only a polished column with a growth of wood and foliage at the head, while there is another of a different species which throws out its vigour in its lower branches, and is only poor and barren at the summit. Then, again, there is the absence of that result of contending elements, the wind—a creature that greatly disturbs human dignity and prevents meditation, except with the healthiest and hardiest of human beings.

It was no wonder that the maiden should have chosen the forest of Pelem as her favourite resort. But there were causes, independently of the attractions described above, which made that forest most welcome to her.

This young girl had travelled with her father, had seen the old towns of Belgium, France, and Italy; and had imbibed that love for whatever is ancient, which is often strongest in those whose country affords the fewest relics of the past. Old

trees were about the oldest things that could be seen in such a new country as Siberia ; and, on that account alone, this wood was very dear to the girl, and much frequented by her.

She sat down upon a fallen tree which lay nearly across the pathway to the town. It adjoined one of the finest trees in the forest ; and, at the point of junction, parasitic plants and mosses had grown up abundantly, forming a nook which made a pleasant seat for two persons. Hence it was that this fallen tree had not been used as firewood, though it was so near the town, and had, indeed gained a significant Russian name, which, being translated, means " For him and her."

She was feeling very glad that the hardest part of her day's work was ended. She sat quietly for some time, so quietly that the squirrels and other small denizens of the wood came out from their hiding-places, and ran hither and thither, regardless of her presence. She seemed to be listening intently, as for the approach of some one who would make more noise amongst the brushwood by his coming than the little creatures which played around her. Then there was heard in the distance the lowing of cattle returning from their scanty pasturage to their stalls in the town. Each one of the herd had a bell round its neck ; and a merry sound of jangling music was borne upon the breeze. This sound seemed to delight the girl, for she sprang up joyfully, and exclaimed, " He will come now. I shall ever love the music of these bells." And then again she sat down upon the tree, and assumed a look of perfect composure and indifference.

The musical approach of the cattle had been heard a few minutes earlier in the town than in the forest ; and no sooner was it heard, than Ivan

de Biron had gone out from the house before described, and had walked, apparently without any purpose, to the forest. He seemed though to know whither to direct his steps, for he soon approached the spot where the girl was sitting, and sat down by her side.

They were a comely pair to look upon. The maiden was beautiful with the beauty of radiant health and strength. The attempt to describe man or woman fully by words, is to ask more from language than it can perform. Nevertheless the attempt must sometimes be made.

The face of this maiden was a most remarkable one. In looking at her, you felt assured that the family from which she sprung must have been of Tartar origin; but all the peculiarities of form and feature belonging to that race, were tempered into beauty. The eyes were somewhat obliquely set in the face; but the colour of them was not that which belongs to the Tartar race, but was of a soft blue. The eye-brows and eyelashes were dark, and the former had no curve of beauty, but were perfectly straight. The nose was slightly *retroussé*. The mouth was larger and wider than is generally supposed to be consistent with beauty. The general colour of the countenance, upon which so much indication of character depends, must originally have been pale, but it was now bronzed, and even reddened by constant exposure to the severe climate. The hands were encased in fur gloves; but, hardened as they were by toil, no one who had seen them would have supposed that they were the hands of the young and beautiful Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff, who, a winter or two ago, had been held in St. Petersburg and Moscow, to be one of the most beautiful young women of her time.

The expression of her countenance was very variable. Sometimes it was tender and submissive; at others it was capable of expressing the fiercest indignation, and did express it.

The young man and the maiden did not sit together, talking idly; but they divided between them the work that had to be done of chopping up the larger pieces of fire-wood, which were afterwards to be carried to her father's hut. There was even a playful contention between them as to who should take the harder work.

"Ah! Marie," exclaimed the young man, "this is not the proper work for you."

"I do not desire to be pitied, Ivan. You may think ill of me, but I do not know whether, if I were to speak truly, I should not say that this was a pleasanter life than that which I led with my French and German governesses. And then one sleeps at nights—such sleep as I never slept in any of my father's palaces. But oh! my father! If he could but endure this life, I should be content. His wretchedness wearies us, and bears us to the ground."

"And so you do not miss all the sweet flatteries that must so often have been addressed to the Princess Marie?"

"Miss them! I loathed them. You young men all talk the same talk, Ivan; but it is poor stuff at the best. If the old wore masks, it is they whom we should love, for they can say something to us which approaches to sense. Some few of them, at least, can talk, whereas you boys can only prattle."

"Nay, Marie, but you cannot say this of me, for, in the times of your splendour, I did not dare to talk to you. I only looked from a dis-

tance at the beautiful young princess, unapproachable by a poor private secretary, though he were—”

“Though he were? Pray finish the sentence Ivan, and disclose the mystery which surrounds you. Who is the other who lives with you?”

“An exile like the rest of us.”

“Exiled by that detestable wretch, the Duke of Courland?”

“Well,—yes—he was the cause of our exile—an exile, for my part, which I cannot but bless, as it has brought me near to thee, my dearest Marie.”

“You are somewhat familiar, sir; I am no one’s ‘dearest Marie,’ but my father’s. Are you noble!”

“And if I were not, would that make so much difference, Marie? I should have thought the life we lead might have effaced these artificial differences of station.”

“And so they should. We, almost serfs and certain beggars, may well dispense with all the mockery of titles. But I would you had been noble, Ivan. It would make us more akin. Poor youth! and so you, too, are one of the thousands of victims of this barbarous man, this Biron. And in what conspiracy did this smooth face partake? It must have been a deep one. It must have taxed the vigilance of the great Duke himself, and all his spies, to have unravelled a plot devised in such a head as this.”

And here, with somewhat of fondness, partially disguised by mockery, she placed her hand upon the head of the young man, and looked laughingly into his eyes. For his part, he was half amused, half offended, by her ridicule. For,

as amongst real criminals, transcendent crime has always a certain dignity and respect attending it, and great criminals are wont to despise petty offenders, so, in Siberia, where past treasons were the common talk, those were the great men, the aristocrats in this miserable population, whose conspiracies against the favourite had been of the largest character, and the most nearly approaching to success.

At this moment there resounded through the still air a hymn, which was being chanted in the little church. It was a hymn well known both to the youth and the maiden, which, indeed, they had often sung side by side, and which spoke of mercy and forgiveness, and of all men being brethren.

They listened for some minutes to these sweet sounds, and sweet they were, for no people in the world, perhaps, not even the Italians, have so passionate a love for music, and so much skill in singing a certain melancholy music of their own, as the Russian peasantry. And here, in that small wooden church, were not merely peasant voices to be heard, but the more refined voices of many an exiled noble.

The hymn did not succeed in soothing the fierce spirit of the maiden. On the contrary, the gracious words did but excite her indignation. "‘Mercy! Forgiveness! All men brethren!’ These priests, and those who think with them, may chant these unreal mockeries; but who can forgive such injuries as I have suffered? My little sister died upon the road; and the barbarians who drove us onward, would not even stay to let us see her buried. My mother’s misery caused her blindness; and my father, once his sovereign’s favourite, and as true a

councillor as ever breathed, is now a moody man, half crazed by sorrow, who paces all day long our narrow room, muttering curses on his persecutor. And they shall be fulfilled; these curses. Would that I had the man before me now! with this hatchet I would hew him down myself. Look not so scared, my gentle Ivan. I hate him all the more for your sake. Your conspiracy must have been a fine plot indeed! Why one man can always kill one man, if he is only brave enough to put his own life in peril. Had you so ventured—Oh, but I would not have had you do so!—that wretch, the Duke of Courland, would not be living now.”

During this outbreak of passion, Ivan had not said a word to interrupt his much-loved Marie. But there was a something in his look which showed displeasure, almost disgust. Her ready apprehension did not fail to see it. With the swift impetuosity of her character, she changed her mood; looked beseechingly at him, and no longer like the tigress, but like the mild and gentle fawn.

“You do not love me now, Ivan? I will be gentle: yes, very gentle. But I may at least, hate him, our common enemy, may I not?—the cause of all our miseries, that Duke of Courland.”

Ivan made no answer. The girl sought to take his hand, which he gave somewhat reluctantly, but which she fondly pressed. After a few minutes' silence, she exclaimed, “I must go, my father waits for me. I am his only comfort, Ivan; and I am ashamed that I waste with you moments which should all be given to him.”

So saying, she sprang up lightly; collected together the wood which they had prepared for

firewood ; and went hastily towards her father's log hut. The young man did not accompany her ; but, after remaining a short time in the forest, returned to his home ; and his looks were very downcast as he entered it.

We all have different ambitions. The one which occupied this young man's soul was of an unusual kind. He had often thought to himself, what he would most desire in the world, and had come to the conclusion that it was—to be supremely loved. That seemed to him the best and greatest success in life. This girl, he felt, did love him greatly ; perhaps as much as it was in her nature to love any one ; but was it of that overpowering kind which would conquer a disposition so foreign and so unpleasing to his own ?

BOOK II.



CHAPTER II.

THE DUKE OF COURLAND IN EXILE.

It was at a late hour on that same day, that the door of that same house which Ivan had entered, was again opened; and the Duke of Courland, with a cloak wrapped round him, concealing his countenance, stepped out and walked away from the town. The scene was now very beautiful. It was a bright night. The moon and the stars shone with a radiance only to be seen in those latitudes. The mist had disappeared, and the peaks of the snowy mountains were now visible.

Miserable as were most of the elder inhabitants of that town, this man's misery exceeded theirs. He spoke; and his was no tame soliloquy, but was loudly uttered, as if he were addressing a multitude.

"The basest of created creatures," he exclaimed, "are men! Why, even their ghosts adore prosperity. They did not haunt me when I was all-powerful; but now they are always with me, mocking and gibbering, and shouting

murder." I fled from them in the house, and, here they are now in multitudes.

"Why did you thwart me? why cross my path, I say? It was death to cross it, and you should have known that. Away with you, fools! The State demanded it; and I, the Duke of Courland, was the State. Do not crowd about me so."

Such were the moody, almost mad utterances of this unhappy man, who for hours would address these imaginary followers with mingled scorn and threats.

If, however, he did not fear these impalpable spectres, conjured up by his remorse, he feared the living victims of his cruelty; for, on the first approach of day-light, he walked swiftly back to that dwelling which he had never suffered any stranger to enter, and from which he never emerged except at midnight.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER III.

RECALL OF IVAN FROM SIBERIA.

FROM the conversation, which has been recounted, between the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff and her lover, Ivan de Biron, a very wrong idea might be formed of that young man's character and disposition. He was one of those frank, kindly, good-natured persons whose real strength of character is often concealed by these amiable qualities of kindness and good-nature. He was quite unfitted to cope with the Princess in an encounter of wit. She affected to treat him as if he were a mere boy, much younger than herself; but, in reality, she had the greatest respect, as well as love for him, and was even a little afraid of him. The calmness of his nature often made her ashamed of her own vehemence and versatility; though, at the same time, it provoked her to a frequent display of these very qualities. Vehemence and versatility are mostly signs of weakness; and in this respect, the Princess, though any-

thing but a weak person, sometimes presented an unfavourable contrast to the firm and strong character of her lover.

Her life had been supremely wretched until Ivan had come amongst them. Her mother's blindness, her father's irritable despondency, the death of her sister, had all been causes which created deep depression of spirits, sufficient to subdue even this brilliant and lively girl. She had jestingly pretended that her present mode of life was endurable when compared with her former life, passed with severe governesses and tutors at St. Petersburg or Moscow. But, until Ivan came, she had mourned, not only for her parents, but for herself, when she recalled to mind the brilliant scenes upon which she had just begun to enter, and where she had been welcomed with all the courteous flattery that was sure to be addressed to the beautiful daughter of a great house, the head of which was in high favour with the late Empress Anne, until that favour had attracted the jealous notice of the supreme favourite, the Duke of Courland.

The household tasks, which were obliged to be performed even by the most delicate young women in this dreary place of exile, were, at first, no slight burden, and no slight suffering. But, as it has often been seen in similar cases, and as may be seen in the present day in our Colonies, these delicate women are wont to meet that part of their fate with a power of resolve, and with an equanimity, which surprises themselves and all who see them. It is even probable that these domestic duties and labours prove the greatest source of comfort to those who fulfill them.

The most miserable among the exiles were those who, like the Princess's father and mother, were chiefly employed in bringing before their own minds the recollections of a brilliant past, and imbittering their nature by a constant expression of hatred to those who had caused their exile. Hatred is very catching; and it would almost have been contrary to nature for the Princess Marie, even had she not been somewhat of a fierce disposition herself, not to have imbibed some of the unbounded hatred which her father felt, and hour by hour, expressed, for his persecutor, the Duke of Courland.

It was but little in the way of political news that ever reached these exiles. They did not know that the Empress Anne was dead; and the Prince supposed that his great enemy was still supreme at the Russian Court, and was still sending fresh batches of exiles to the remote parts of Siberia. The escort which had brought the ex-regent to this town of Pelem, had arrived in the evening, and had left on the ensuing morning. It may be doubted whether the rough soldiers who had formed the Duke of Courland's escort, and who had received their prisoner at a stage one hundred versts from Pelem, their ultimate destination, were aware of the rank of that prisoner, or, if they had been aware, would have been in the least degree interested by it. They performed their hard duty in their hard way, and troubled themselves very little about political events.

Whatever may have been the cause, it is certain that the exiles in this town had not the slightest notion that the moody man who dwelt in this two-storied house, and who had only been seen in the distance by one or two of them at

early dawn, was their enemy and persecutor; the man to whom most of them owed their present state of suffering and exile.

An event, however, now occurred, which would be likely to defeat all the Duke of Courland's hopes of being able to remain unknown to his companions.

At first, every one, however remotely connected with the banished Duke, had been seized and sentenced to a Siberian exile. Count Münnich was not a man who was disposed to do his business by halves. The ex-regent's long tenure of power had introduced his friends, or those who were supposed to be such, into every department of the State; and Count Münnich was naturally afraid of any counter-revolution that might be attempted by a number of disappointed and desperate men, who would be aware that under the new *régime* they would be looked upon with but little favour. They were accordingly dealt with in the severe manner that partisans of a defeated faction were sure to be dealt with, in such a country and at such a time.

The general joy, however, which was manifested by the great body of the people, at the downfall of the Regent, tended to reassure both Count Münnich and the new Duchess Regent. It was doubtless soon discovered, that in Biron's family and household, there were many who would have regarded his downfall with delight, if it had not involved themselves in ruin.

It now appeared, for men dared to speak out openly, that our young hero, Ivan, had, on more than one occasion, sought to mitigate his master's fury; and had even dared, secretly, to give orders in that master's name, that certain exiles

should be humanely treated by the escort that conveyed them on the outset of their journey from St. Petersburg or Moscow. The pleasant and comely countenance of the youth had been noticed by the Duchess Regent, to whom, on some occasion during the first few days of his regency, the Duke of Courland had sent him to obtain a signature, or to arrange some other small matter of business.

It was not known at the time, and Ivan himself never knew who it was, that interceded in his favour with the Duchess Regent, or with Count Münnich, all-powerful for the time. But the intercession was successful; and an order was despatched to the place of the Duke of Courland's banishment, recalling his private secretary, Ivan, and one or two other persons of inferior note, who had been exiled to that town at the earlier time of Prince Menschikoff's downfall.

The persons who brought this order did not return as quickly as the Duke of Courland's escort had done. One of them was a civilian, the secretary to the Governor of one of the provinces of Siberia. This man was cognizant of all that had occurred at Court; and he had not been many hours in the town before it was known to all the inhabitants that the late Empress Anne was dead; that the Duke of Courland had been Regent for a few days; that he was deposed from power, and was now an exile like themselves. The secretary to the Governor was, of course, aware that Biron himself was there. He had gone first to the ex-regent's house, with the order of release for Ivan; but he had been moved by the Duke's prayers and entreaties—so far as not to betray the fact of the

presence there of the late Sovereign minister. The wary official probably bethought himself that, in the frequent revolutions to which Russia was subject, there might come one which would bring Biron back to power again; and the Duke, he well knew, was not a man who would ever forget an injury. This official person, therefore, promised his Highness to be silent as to the Duke's whereabouts; and he kept his word.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER IV.

IVAN'S PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE.

PRINCE SERBATOFF was in an ecstasy of delight when he heard of the discomfiture of his great enemy. "It makes me young again," he exclaimed. "Think of the joy of thousands, who must know now, or I trust they do, that this villain is suffering what he has so long made all of us suffer. How is it, Marie, that you do not partake our joy? Even your mother no longer weeps. Look out now. It is a scene of delight. Behold the mists crawling up from this hideous surface of the earth. Ha! it is cold. Would that it were ten times colder! I hate the spring now. Why does it come so early? He should have had all the agonies of a Siberian winter, to burst upon him in the first moments of his exile, as I had. There are no supreme joys, Marie, without some drawback: and you, girl, I do not understand you. Dance, sing, be merry, put wood upon the fire. We will use it all up to-day; and, sitting round its merry

blaze, will think of him, and hope, for God is good, that there is no one to serve him, none of his slaves with him, no one to tend his fire. And his hands were delicate. The soft hands of a girl—the hands that were thought so beautiful by his vain and empty-headed mistress.”

The Princess Marie listened with a dejected countenance to these wild ravings of her father. Leaving the room upon some pretext of domestic work, she thus spoke to herself, as, with hasty steps, she walked up and down in front of their hut :—

“How base am I ! I should rejoice at Ivan’s happiness, but, oh, what misery to me ! Would that he had never come—that I had never been mocked by the joy of his companionship ! And then to lose him—lose him for ever ; for some girl will treat him better than I have done with my caprice and folly. And men are not as constant as we are. And then he is so loveable and loving. He has not come near me. He fears to come near me. He fears to show how happy he is in quitting this detested place. But there will be protestations and promises, and vows. I distrust them all. He does not come, and to whom should he have been the first to tell his good fortune ? Who would have sympathised with him most deeply ? For I will do so, whatever it shall cost me. We are not as the meaner women, unable to command our feelings ; or, at least, we have the power to conceal them.”

She had been looking down upon the ground, as she had uttered these words to herself ; and, looking up, she saw that Ivan was approaching her.

No joy sat upon his countenance, but instead of that, the utmost dejection.

"You have heard the news, Marie," he said in a low voice; and, as he spoke, he put his arm round her. She, however, disengaged herself from it, and said, in calm tones: "Yes, I have heard it, Ivan, and it is glorious news indeed. Recalled to St. Petersburg, perhaps to Court favour, you will become a great man, Ivan. You must quite forget us poor exiles who remain; but how," she added with a smile, "shall I ever find another fellow-woodsman with his kind aid to make my labour light? To-day we were to have sung together in the church, and I was to have practised with you and taught you. 'Tis little I can teach, but I am the better musician. Say, shall we try it? for I suppose you do not leave us suddenly, and we will have a hymn of joy for your departure."

The only answer that he made, was to take both her hands in his, and, looking at her steadfastly, if not severely, he uttered her name, 'Marie' reproachfully.

She again disengaged herself from him, and began talking much in the same strain in which she had soliloquised, all of which talk went to show that she considered him as henceforward free, and not likely to remember what had passed between them while they were both in exile.

Ivan's anger was roused. He said to her, "Princess Marie, you know that while you and yours are in exile, at no moment of my life will the thought that you are so, and the endeavour to procure your recall, be laid aside. After, that event, should it ever happen, I shall never cease to love you as I have hitherto loved you, with my whole heart and soul, but you shall then be perfectly free; and I am well aware that it is not likely that the Princess Marie Andréevna

will ever think more of one so much beneath her in station as I am. And let me tell you now, knowing all your faults, knowing how hard it would be to secure your affections, I still can never love any other woman but you. Do you think that anything would induce me to leave you now, to give up the joy of sometimes sharing your troubles and your burdens, if it were not for the hope, however vain that hope may be, of gaining your recall from this horrible place? Otherwise, it would be torture to me to leave you."

This was not exactly a lover-like speech, for lovers seldom venture to allude to the faults of their mistresses, but it was very significant of the strong, frank, and determined character of the young man, and perhaps it was the very best mode that he could have adopted for subduing her.

The Princess moved towards him timidly, then threw her arms round him, and using the fondest expressions of love, vowed that she would never forget him in his absence, and would never marry any one but him. At this moment the lovers were interrupted by the sudden appearance on the scene of the two persons who of all that little community, would be to them the most unwelcome witnesses of their parting as lovers.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER V.

NARISKOFF'S CHARACTER AND CONDUCT—IVAN LEAVES PELEM.

AMONGST the exiles who dwelt in that little town of Pelem, was one of the name of Nariskoff.

He was a person of remarkable character. He had originally been a man of fortune, the lord of many serfs. He had also been a great philanthropist; and had, as a youth, for his father died early, sought to improve the condition of those serfs. Previously to any great change for good in the world's affairs, there are solitary instances, here and there, of persons who foresee the possibility of attaining the good thing; make premature attempts to attain it; and perish in the attempt. In this case it was not literally perishing, for Nariskoff did not die; but he lost his fortune, and, what was more to be regretted, he lost his faith and his hope in mankind. Few men become so sour as disappointed philanthropists.

Nariskoff's main and guiding theory in his early life was so remarkable a one, that it deserves mention here, for, with some modifications, it is as applicable at the present time as it was at that period. He used to say, that as long as the lower stratum of mankind was miserable, all the other strata would be miserable too. He would add: "Why all these strivings and strugglings in our own class, but that we fear that we ourselves, or our descendants, should fall down into that lowest class. We desire especially to keep them as far removed from that as possible; and so we plan, and we plot, and we work, and we slave, and we contend with our fellow-men, and we worship the great 'Emperor, Rouble', and we are miserable, all of us."

This, of course, is but a very partial view of human affairs; but poor Nariskoff was entirely possessed by it; and it may not altogether be unworthy of notice, in an age when competition of all kinds is idolized.

Nariskoff had, by no means, even in his earlier and better days, been without great faults of character. He was a very sensual man. Much love for ourselves, and for self-enjoyment, often goes hand in hand with considerable love for others, especially for their material well-being. Nariskoff, deceived and even injured by those serfs whom he had tried to raise—mocked at by his neighbours—scorned by his relatives, who had even endeavoured to make him out a lunatic,—and looked upon by the authorities as a dangerous man—fell into deep disgrace, as well as utter misfortune. He was, however, a very witty and humorous person; and having given up all hope of benefiting "those copious fools," as he was wont to call them,

"his fellow creatures," and even having taken a dislike to them, he resolved, for the remainder of his life, to do little more than prey upon them.

A Timon, of a lower order than that which the great master of human character has depicted, Nariskoff did not retire into a desert; but, on the contrary, sought out the busiest haunts of men. His powers of entertainment made his presence acceptable at the tables of the great. Gradually he had become accustomed to his dependent condition, and his wit degenerated more and more into ill-natured personal satire, so that latterly before his exile, his company had been more sought from fear than from regard. Though, comparatively speaking, an obscure man, his obscurity had not saved him from exile. When Prince Serbatoff was banished, Nariskoff, being supposed to be an intimate friend of the Prince's, was, with him, condemned to exile. There was not one of the exiles who more deplored his lot than he did. He had become a thorough sensualist, and bitterly mourned over the loss of the rich viands and luxurious living for which he had bartered his wit in former days.

During his exile he had shown no particular gratitude to his former friend and benefactor, Prince Serbatoff. Indeed, he considered the Prince as the cause, however innocent, of his own exile, and was embittered against him on that account. He did not quarrel with the Prince: quarrelling was not Nariskoff's forte; but he did not seek to do him any service, and indeed he rather avoided the Serbatoff family, fearing lest he might be called upon to aid the young Princess in her servile labours.

One friend, however, or rather one associate,

this man had found among the dwellers of that little town. And this was a half-witted person of the name of Matchka. This poor creature was not an exile, but one of the original inhabitants of the town—perhaps a descendant of some exile. If there were any special reason that made Nariskoff attach himself to this simpleton, it was that he could put into Matchka's mouth the ill-natured sayings which he himself feared to utter.

It was the approach of Nariskoff and Matchka, that had suddenly been noticed by the lovers, and had not a little disconcerted them. Most of the inhabitants of the town had, at that time of the day, gone to their work ; but Nariskoff, who somehow or other still continued to live upon his wits without work, and Matchka, who throve upon his folly, did not indulge in daily labour, and could afford time to observe other people, and to meddle in their affairs. Indeed, it was upon this meddling humour that they lived and prospered, as far as anybody could prosper in that region of misery.

Upon seeing these two men in the distance, the lovers immediately separated, the Princess going into her father's hut, and Ivan returning to the Duke of Courland's house.

It had been arranged that Ivan was to start that evening on his return to St. Petersburg. The scene at his departure was a very touching one. Almost every family of the exiles had prepared letters which they furtively entrusted to his care. But, more than that,—he was almost torn to pieces by persons privately soliciting him to aid their cause at Court. He had become a very great man among them. No sooner had he begun to listen to the story of some poor exile, who was declaring his innocence of all plots against

any government, and vowing that he had always felt the deepest attachment to the present Duchess Regent and the Field Marshal, Count Münnich, than, he, (Ivan) was forcibly carried off to some other group to listen to a similar story and similar protestations of duty and affection to the new reigning powers. If any cynical observer, perfectly cognizant of the state of affairs at the Russian Court, had been present, it would have amused him to think how idle, nay, how injudicious such protestations were, seeing that at this very time, the chief conspirators who had deposed the Regent from power, were now in bitterest enmity with one another. By the time that Ivan reached the capital, another revolution, or semi-revolution, had occurred; and Count Münnich was no longer in power.

During the remainder of the day of Ivan's departure, the two lovers had no opportunity of meeting, except in the presence of other persons. And when he left the town, the crowd of applicants for favour who surrounded him, prevented the approach of her whose fond words at parting could, alone, have been of any comfort to him

BOOK II.



CHAPTER VI.

DISCOVERY OF THE DUKE OF COURLAND BY HIS FELLOW-EXILES.

WHEN the exiles who dwelt in Pelem, had time to think of anything but themselves and their hopes in reference to the letters which they had entrusted to Ivan, they could not help noticing that the mysterious man, (friend, or relative they knew not) with whom Ivan had dwelt, had not made himself visible on the occasion of the young man's departure, and had not been present to exchange a parting salutation with him.

This man became more than ever an object of curiosity, and he was now occasionally obliged to make himself visible, for though the Starost of the village had received orders to supply him with food and fuel, there were occasions on which, from some trifling circumstance or other, he was obliged to leave his house in the daytime.

Nariskoff had naturally had his eye upon this mysterious stranger. He had shrewdly conjectured that he must be a person of some especial

importance, to be favoured as he was; and Nariskoff was anxious to share the advantages which arose from this favour. He had before schemed to secure the liking of rich and great men, in order to sit at luxurious banquets; but now the humblest necessities of life had become in that community objects of the most precious kind. Doubtless among savages there is as much refined flattery with an eye to choice feathers, shells, or wampum, as amongst civilized people to gain favours of the highest kind. Nariskoff had several times endeavoured to win an entrance into the two-storied house; but all his advances to its mysterious occupant had met with no shadow of response. Nariskoff had therefore given up this mode of procedure, and had determined upon hostility to gain his ends.

It happened that one day at evening, the Duke, feeling very solitary at home now that Ivan had departed, had ventured out of his house. He was still closely muffled up, and had devoted himself to studying the means of disguising his personal appearance. There were, unfortunately for him, many of the exiles in the straggling street at this moment. It was the day of a great Russian festival; and these exiles, like all other persons in their position, held very much to ancient usages which reminded them of home and former days. The little church was lighted up; and the townsmen were gathered together in groups waiting to welcome a procession of priests and choristers, who were to enter the church, when the service would begin.

The Duke, on perceiving the concourse that he had come upon most unwittingly, for he took no heed of festivals, and indeed had always been a stranger in the land, made a movement to

return to his house. Then, thinking probably that this would excite increased suspicion, he went boldly forward in the direction towards the great forest that half-encircled the town. "Now," thought Nariskoff, "is my opportunity!"

Matchka was a devout believer in the Russian Church and its ceremonies, in which he was often allowed to take a humble part, and this was the poor half-witted man's chief delight. He could starve, or would, if he had any food, share it with his friend Nariskoff, whom he venerated; but not even Nariskoff could have persuaded him, upon any pretext, to absent himself from the least important ceremony of the Church.

Bitter, at that time, was the dislike of an orthodox believer in the Greek Church to a follower of the sect of Raskolnicks.* Suddenly the thought flashed into Nariskoff's mind of what might be done to tear off the veil, as it were, from the mysterious man, by enlisting the foolish Matchka's bigotry for that purpose.

"Matchka," he said, "do you see that man going away from our great festival of Saint Alexander Newski? As I live, he is a Raskolnick. You must prevent his going. We will know whether he is a Raskolnick or not; and, if he is, his presence must no longer defile Pelem. You must insist upon seeing him face to face. We never have seen what he looks like."

This was quite sufficient inducement for Matchka to do what he then did. He ran after the Duke, and seized him by his cloak, crying out at the same time that he was a Raskolnick. A violent altercation took place. The Duke endeavoured to force his way on. Matchka barred his progress.

* Raskolnick means 'divider' or 'sectarian.'

Meanwhile, Nariskoff had rapidly moved from group to group, and had drawn their attention to the contest between the fool and the mysterious man. Nariskoff took Prince Serbatoff aside. "My little Father," he said, "is there no one of whom that man reminds you? He must be some one whom you would know, or he would not have bread and fuel found for him by the orders of the Governor, while we have to toil for our scanty living."

The Prince, in general indifferent to all that surrounded him, thinking himself the greatest man amongst those exiles, who alone had never even turned his head to look at this new companion in misery, was compelled by Nariskoff's earnest entreaties to turn and regard him.

The contest between Matchka and the Duke had now proceeded from words to blows. They closed in their encounter; and, as they struggled together, the Duke's cloak, his furred cap, and some parts of his artificial disguisement were torn off.

"God in Heaven!" exclaimed the Prince, "it is the Duke of Courland—the Regent of yesterday—the accursed wretch to whom all our misery is due!"

From group to group the information spread like wildfire. At first there was doubt; but not for long, as many there had seen and trembled at the countenance of the Duke of Courland. Then there was wonder: then horror mixed with fear, as of slaves who suddenly see their master bereft of power, but still, from the tyranny of custom, cannot believe it. Then there was a general movement towards him; and he was at bay with all his enemies—enemies who had for years been nursing hatred towards him. Matchka

had now got the best of the encounter, and remained at a few paces from the Duke, crying out loudly that he was a Raskolnick.

The greatness of mind which there was in De Biron, did not desert him on this occasion. He looked composedly around and said, "Yes, I am the Duke of Courland, by right your Regent; and what then?"

The crowd were awed at first; but this awe did not last long. The more violent of them sprang upon him. So fierce and furious was their handling of him, that his clothing was almost at once torn to pieces. This would undoubtedly have been his last moment of life, had not the priests and their attendants, wondering at the neglect which their entry into the church had met with, come out of it again, and approached the scene of conflict.

With sturdy blows and violent denunciations, which no man ventured to return or gainsay, they forced their way towards the Duke's assailants, and imperatively demanded that he should be given up to them. Prince Serbatoff seconded their endeavours, and he was warmly aided by the Starost. Their joint commands were obeyed. The Duke, in a most miserable plight,—half-naked, bruised and bleeding—was delivered up to the priests, who led him to his own house, around which, till midnight, the ceremonies of the church being altogether forgotten, there was one wild, continuous howl of execration.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER VII.

A WOMAN'S PITY FOR THE DUKE OF COURLAND.

WITH the exception of those who were blind or bed-ridden, there was not a single person in the little community of exiles, who had not been a witness of the proceedings recounted in the last chapter. The Princess Marie was one of the maidens who assisted in the choir, and she had come out of the church with the priests, when they hurried forth to learn the cause of the disturbance. She had seen the man to whom all eyes had been directed in the plenitude of his power; and she could not but remember, that, at her first appearance at the Russian Court, her chief desire had been to know what *he* was like, who was the greatest man at Court. She had been presented to him; and was much gratified by the few kind words which he had addressed to the daughter of his colleague, whom he had not then determined to send to Siberia.

It was impossible for one, in whose mind was

much of poetry and romance, not to be affected greatly when she beheld the same man dragged to his house, wounded, bleeding and half naked, a miserable spectacle to gods and men. Not that her hatred was less; for the Princess had inherited from her father an ample faculty for hating.

Her first thoughts, however, were about Ivan; and they were very bitter. She felt that she had been deceived. She absolutely raged at the thought that this young man, the devoted follower, for so she held him to be, of the arch-enemy of her house, had gained her love without revealing himself. In her first access of anger, she did not pause to think that Ivan was bound by the strictest ties of honour, not to disclose his master's name; neither did she pause to conjecture that which had really been the truth, namely, that Ivan had at first sought her society, in order that he might aid her in her daily domestic labours. He had, it is true, admired her at a distance, when she first appeared at Court. He had afterwards, on the downfall of her family, constituted himself their unknown protector. But, at the beginning of their intimacy at Pelem, it had never entered even into his wildest dreams to imagine that he should win her love, or should even attempt to do so.

The community of exile had not effaced that difference of rank and station, which, in later times, was maintained in the prisons of the French revolution, where the noblesse still held together, and when the difference of caste was felt up to the very moment when the tumbril was to convey to the guillotine the ill-assorted batches of human victims.

But the love had come; and even, with her

present feelings of bitterness and almost of aversion, the Princess could not but own to herself, for she was one of those persons who never knowingly practised self-deception, that she loved Ivan, and only Ivan, and would continue to love him to the end of her days. She did not, however, hesitate in making a stern resolve to give him up. And it was with a feeling of indignation that she thought of the efforts he would be sure to make, to procure the recall of herself and her family. She hated to think of being under obligation to one who, as she thought, had so cruelly and basely deceived her.

It may be imagined with what expressions of triumph and joy the Prince described to his blind wife the scene which he had just witnessed, and the part which he himself had taken in it. Yet even he could not altogether omit throwing in some remarks which tended towards pity, when he dwelt upon the contrast of the Regent's former position and of his present condition. It might have been observed, that the Prince had a cynical delight in speaking of De Biron as the Regent.

The poor blind lady, a deeply religious woman, could not help occasionally expressing her pity in such moderate terms as she ventured to use in her husband's presence; and, when she was alone with her daughter, she spoke with the fullness of commiseration which her own long-suffering had taught her.

Women have a great pity for physical suffering. It is a blessed thing that it is so. There are some amongst them who perhaps do not sympathize as much as men expect with the mental anxieties and sufferings of a man, and

especially with his care about distant things—distant from home as it were, such as the great questions touching upon politics, religion, or the future hopes and prospects of the world. But, for present disaster of any kind and for physical suffering, women have a depth and keenness of pity and sympathy which is almost beyond the ken of the sterner partners of their lives.

It is well, for the understanding of the complicated history of Russia at this period, and also for the right understanding of this narrative, to state that De Biron's overthrow, however much personal gratification it might afford to people like the Prince, was not, politically speaking, a great cause for rejoicing to them. The friends of Menschikoff, Peter the Great's favourite, and notably those who had been employed by the late Empress Anne, were considered by the present Duchess Regent as her especial enemies; and the Regent's downfall was not a revolution which could affect them favourably. Now the Prince was one of those persons; and, therefore, no word of congratulation passed among the members of this family with regard to their own future prospects by reason of the political changes which had occurred.

The Princess Marie passed an agitated and sleepless night. The turmoil of her soul was great. She was torn by emotions of the most opposite kind. Her love for Ivan—her wrath with him—even contempt for him—her hatred for the Duke of Courland—her pity for his abject condition—alternately occupied and ruled her mind. At last she came to a determination, respecting which it would be very difficult to assign all the

motives, good and bad, which led to it. One motive must be candidly confessed. It was, however, an after-thought. But it must be owned that the Princess did think that what she was about to do, would be a sort of triumph over Ivan, and would serve to diminish the weight of any obligation which either his past or his future services to her family might impose upon her. These after-thoughts of worldly wisdom often occur, as attendants upon the most generous actions, and are even used as an excuse for performing those actions.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUKE'S COMFORTER.

WE must return to the Duke of Courland. His sufferings were great; but, strange to say, they were more of a physical than a moral kind. He had often anticipated in his mind the discovery that had just occurred, and its consequences, so that when the evil thing really did come, it neither surprised nor shocked him very much. He had, in fact, never hoped to escape with life when it should once be discovered who he was.

The Duke was a man of nice and delicate habits who had loved luxury and splendour very much; and his cruelty to others had not rendered him less tender of his own person. He dressed his wounds as best he could, re-clothed himself, and laid himself down on the floor, for he feared lest, if he went to bed, he should there be surprised, in a most defenceless state, by an inroad of his enemies.

It was two or three hours after mid-night; and

he was slumbering with the light and broken sleep which is the utmost that persons in pain and in great fear of peril can hope to enjoy, when he was awakened by a gentle knocking at the door of his house. He made no movement in response. The knocking continued. On reflection it seemed likely to him that the priests or the Starost of the village might be coming to him on a good errand, wishing to remove him secretly from the fury of the people.

He went softly to the roof of the house, and looked down. By the light of the moon, he saw that it was a woman, and, as it seemed to him, a young woman who was still gently knocking at the door. At first he thought that there might be some ambush, and that there were persons ready to rush in, if he should open the door to her. He gazed intently : he listened intently. There was nothing unusual to be seen or heard ; and the brilliancy with which the moon shone, was such as to light up every nook and corner near the house.

The Duke went down and admitted his visitor. He held up his lamp to her face as she entered ; but he did not recognize any countenance that he had ever known. In truth it would have been difficult to recognize, in the imbrowned features, in the sordid dress, and in the marked lines of purpose which were now to be seen in the Princess Marie's countenance, the pallid, delicate, refined and splendidly attired young lady who had been introduced to him at Court.

"What are you come for?" he exclaimed.

"To take care of you," she replied.

"Why?" was his answer. "Are you a friend, or the daughter of a friend? Are you sent by the priests, or by the Starost?"

"No I am not: you must be ill, you are wounded, you are in pain; and it is my duty, as a woman, to care for you."

The Duke looked at her fixedly. He had not hitherto had a very good opinion of mankind. As far as he had known them, they had been chiefly servile adulators, or nascent conspirators. It was, perhaps, the first time in his life that he felt what possible worth there was in human nature. He shivered slightly, then took her hand, and felt the tears rise to his eyes, the pitying tears for himself, and a sort of sympathy with her sympathy for himself.

There was but little more said between them. She only remarked in business-like tones, that her time was short; and then, quite composedly, as if she had been as accustomed to dress wounds as a Sister of Mercy at a hospital, she unrolled some linen bandages which she had prepared.

So clumsily had the Duke dressed his own wounds, that the blood was slightly oozing from their bandages. He submitted himself entirely to her management, far more skilful than his own; and half an hour was spent before his wounds had been re-dressed, and every alleviation that she could give to his sufferings, had been rendered.

Before they parted, he again sought to know who she was. She declined to tell him. He seized her hand, and pressed it warmly. She withdrew it with evident repugnance. He was unable to flatter himself that there was any friendly feeling, or anything more than the merest woman-like pity in the service this girl had rendered to him. She only said, on leaving the house, "I will come again to-morrow night."

Notwithstanding her injunctions that he should not leave his position, he rushed to the door directly she had quitted it; but was not quick enough to discern which way she had taken; and he remained in utter ignorance of the dwelling of his benefactress.

Comforted in body, but not consoled in mind, the ex-Regent lay down upon the floor again.

Night after night the Princess Marie returned to render him similar services. By day he was safe, as the Starost of the village had placed a guard near the house; but little or no attention had, otherwise, been given to his sufferings. Indeed none cared whether he lived or died. The only desire of the priests and the Starost was that the Duke's death should not be caused by violence at the hands of his brother exiles.

There have been many strange conversations in the world; but perhaps none have been stranger than those which took place between the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff and his Highness the ex-Regent of Russia.

He felt intuitively that she condemned him, and that she was probably one of those who had suffered from his indiscriminate cruelty. He sought to justify himself. He told her the story of his life. He enumerated the great things he had done, and the great things he intended to have done, for Russia.

Her replies, when any replies she made, were chilling. Once, and once only, she reminded him of a signal act of cruelty which he had authorized. He bowed his head, and made no answer. The Princess Marie felt at the moment how untrue she had been to the functions she had taken upon herself of a nurse to this wretched being; and she did not commit a similar fault

again—at any rate during the height of his illness, and when any excitement might increase his feverish symptoms.

It would be tedious to recount the various conversations which took place between the Princess Marie and the Duke of Courland. It may suffice to relate the following one as being very significant of the characters of these two remarkable persons. The Princess Marie, woman-like, sought to do some good to the soul, as well as to the body of her patient. She had been bred up to think him a monster of iniquity, and was surprised to perceive few, if any, signs of repentance for his former cruelties.

The conversation turned, as she often contrived it should turn, upon the ways of managing men. It may be premised that the Princess, finding it awkward to be without a name for these occasions, had on a previous day told the Duke to call her Katerina. It was her mother's name.

The conversation which had begun in a playful way, about the difficulty of managing a sick man, had come to this pass, that they were in high dispute upon the vexed question, still remaining vexed for us, as to whether men were to be ruled by gentleness or severity.

"I do not see the use of so much knout," the Princess exclaimed; "it only hardens men."

"I do:" replied the Duke, "you would, I suppose, prefer the punishment of death?"

"I should prefer no punishment at all," rejoined the Princess somewhat nettled,—"no punishment at all for most of the so-called crimes which have been so severely punished in recent times."

"Did you know my private Secretary, Katerina? You must, I think, have seen him. A tall young man with fair hair? He used to sing with the priests."

"Rather innocent looking, if I recollect rightly," was her reply.

"Yes: innocent looking," said the Duke: "more so than some people who are wont to talk the same nonsense as he did. I remember—'twas that same night when the arch-villain, Münnich, stole upon me—that this youth was good enough (I own I asked for his opinion) to impart to me his views of government, and to inform me that my rule had been too severe. The young are always rebels—rebels at heart."

"Perhaps," replied the Princess, "it is because they are justly dissatisfied with the rule of their elders, and think that something better might be made of life than what they see around them."

"And is that 'better'?" said the Duke, "to come by means of conspiracies and revolutions? Now listen to me, young woman, have you ever thought what a State is?"

"I don't know, my lord, that I have ever thought what statesmen like your Highness take a State to be; but it seems to my poor childish mind, that a State is not a very glorious thing, when it requires to be maintained by the constant use of the knout, the rack, the axe, and exile."

The Duke of Courland walked up and down the room several times in silence; and then with much energy of voice and manner addressed the Princess thus.

"There are millions of fellow-subjects in this State, that we are talking of. Every one of them has infinite desires. He would be all in all. It is only by the strong arm of the law suspended over him, that he is held for a moment from molesting his weaker neighbour. The State may be ever so rudely formed; but it has taken

hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years to get it into any form whatever—to enable men to work together in something like peace, and to husband something for the future. If this be true of other States, it is pre-eminently true of Russia—of Russia, hardly yet rescued from the condition of wandering nomadic tribes. And all this you would upset upon the chance of making something better—you, with your juvenile wisdom, Katerina. Ivan, that is his name, was almost as wise as yourself.”

The Princess felt that she blushed as she heard their names so brought together. Had Ivan told the ex-Regent anything? Surely not, she said to herself.

The Duke continued. “You brush away, in your housewifely neatness, a spider’s web. It is well—but could you make the thing again? Not even that. And yet you are sure you could reconstruct, and greatly improve upon the delicate but strong net-work of interwoven webs of custom, law, manners, lineage and history, of which a State is formed, and by which its people are kept in harmony. Unravel it, or destroy it, you can, if rulers are fools enough to let you do so.”

Again there was silence for a minute or two, for the Princess, perceiving the fierce irony of the ex-Regent’s mood, did not dare to interrupt him. “Why, girl,” he resumed, “did I not, as I have told you before, raise towns, build bridges, keep rivers within due bounds, bring men of science to the capital, and continually promote that civilization, which had been the dream—a noble one, I must say—of that barbarian Peter? And then, that smooth-faced youth and you, for I can see what you are always hinting at, would con-

demn the Duke of Courland because he sent a few thousand useless and troublesome people into exile, and so saved the State."

In almost every Russian room there is, in one of the corners of it, a rude picture of the Almighty or of our Saviour, with a lamp burning under it.

The only reply the Princess made to this tirade, was by pointing to this picture and saying, "Were those the means that He would have used—that He enjoined?"

"I did not rule over Christians," replied the Duke.

"I thought," said the Princess, "that the orthodox Greek Church was Christian."

"You thought so, did you, my innocent Katerina: some thousands of years hence, the mass of mankind may be Christian, for aught I know, —though I think it unlikely; but it is not Christian now, and must be ruled as it was in Pagan times. Boys and girls may dream; but it is men who have to rule. That is the answer I have to make to you—you cowards—as well as to her." Here the Duke looked wildly about him.

This was the first time that the Princess had any suspicion, and now it was but a faint suspicion, of the Duke's remorse; for she could perceive that he was addressing some imaginary beings. She began to fear for his sanity; and, as rapidly as possible, endeavoured to change the subject, requesting to see how his wounds were progressing. The Duke perceived her aim, and fearing lest by his violence he should have frightened her, said no more upon these dangerous topics; but submitted his wounds for her inspection; and for the short time that remained previously to her departure, endeavoured to make

the conversation light and lively, and so to efface the painful impression which he saw that he had made upon her mind. Few persons were more skilled than the Duke of Courland in all the arts which go to make pleasant companionship. It was not, however, without many misgivings as regarded his sanity, and some fear as to any future visit, that the Princess Marie took her departure that morning as daylight began to appear.

The Duke of Courland, as is the case with many men whose whole lives are spent in the endeavour to rise in the world, had never really known what love was. He had never profoundly admired, or greatly respected, any woman. He had been the late Empress's favourite; and, as many persons believed, her favoured lover. He had married a daughter of one of the nobles of Cawland; and his marriage had not been an unhappy one. Neither had he failed, in earlier days, to have considerable affection for the Empress, who had been constant to him in almost slavish devotion. But he had never known what it was to lose all thought of himself in his admiration for any woman; to idealize all her perfections; and to think that converse with her was the greatest blessing this earth could give.

Something of that kind he began to feel now; and yet it was not exactly love that he felt, at least in its ordinary sense. The Duke was a very shrewd man, and knew that there was nothing like love possible either on her side, or on his. He fully recognized that it was only from pity, that she had devoted herself to serve and tend an outcast, such as he was. He worshipped her from a distance, as it were;

and the improvement in the character of the man, might be seen, in that he it was who urged her, night after night, not to return to him again, at peril to herself, though he felt that almost the only hope or comfort left to him in life, was the returning presence of this maiden.

If we were to analyse what were the Princess Marie's thoughts and feelings, we should find that her hatred for the ex-Regent had greatly diminished. It is almost impossible for a man, it is certainly impossible for a woman, to serve and tend any human being, without acquiring, though almost unconsciously, a certain liking for the creature so served and tended. And the Princess, though she possessed a character of some sternness, was not superior to her sex in this respect. She began to feel much less of disgust, and somewhat even of regard, for one, to whom she had rendered such great service.

During this time remarkable events were occurring at the Court of Russia, which had much influence upon the fate and fortunes of most of the persons who were actors in this story; and these events must now be related.

BOOK III.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER I.

THE PRINCESS ELIZABETH'S CHARACTER AND POSITION
—THE DUCHESS OF BRUNSWICK MADE REGENT—
LESTOCQ AND THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR LA CHÉ-
TARDIE—THEIR CONSPIRACY.

THERE are those who contend that the march of events would have been all the same whether certain forcible individuals who, moreover, have had the opportunity of bringing their powers into action, had lived or not. This, however, seems but fond pedantry to those, who, on the other hand, think that all history is, for the most part, little else than a series of biographies of eminent persons.

To this latter class of the students of history, it must ever appear strange that a certain eminent person at the Russian Court had, hitherto, during the various changes of supreme power, made so little figure, and had been apparently of so little account.

This person was the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great and of Catharine his second wife.

There was no Salic law in Russia.

The Princess was known to be a woman of considerable ability, inheriting many of her father's great qualities ; and yet on every occasion she is unaccountably passed over. It is not to be supposed that her illegitimacy (for she was born during the lifetime of Peter's first wife) was, alone, a sufficient disqualification. The most plausible solution that occurs, is, that, in the early part of her life, she was utterly unambitious, and indeed was wholly devoted to pleasure of all kinds. During the greater part of the reign of the Empress Anne, the Princess Elizabeth had remained perfectly quiet ; had never meddled with State affairs ; nor, apparently, had taken any interest in them. She probably thought that the Crown would quietly devolve upon her after the death of that Empress.

It was not until the present Duchess Regent, who was only a grand-daughter of Peter the Great's elder brother, married Anthony Ulric, Duke of Brunswick, that the Princess began to form a party.

This she did with the utmost secrecy. She might still have been chosen by Biron to succeed the Empress Anne, but for the circumstance of an infant child being born to the Duchess of Brunswick.

The infancy of this child gave a pretext for Biron's appointment to the Regency ; and, doubtless, induced him to use his predominant influence in favour of the choice which the Empress finally made of this infant as her successor.

The Grand Duchess of Brunswick, now the Regent, committed a great political error, though a very natural one, when she joined with Münnich

in his conspiracy against Biron. By the Duke of Courland's downfall the Grand Duchess was deprived of the only statesman who could have saved her, and assured the kingdom to her infant son. It is true that another statesman was left to her—Count Ostermann. But his infirmities, though sometimes exaggerated by him, and made most useful to account for his absence on any critical occasion, were real, and would not allow him to supply the place of the vigorous and suspicious Duke of Courland.

On the other hand, the Princess Elizabeth had two persons who were devoted to her interests, and were very ready to embark in conspiracy, if not well-skilled in conducting it. They were both of them Frenchmen. One was Lestocq, the surgeon of her household; the other was the Marquis De la Chétardie, the French ambassador.

Ambassadors in those days did not hesitate to interfere, as partisans, in the internal affairs of the countries they were accredited to; and, it is said, that La Chétardie had instructions from his own Court to foment any kind of internal discord in Russia, with a view to prevent her from becoming troublesome to the rest of Europe, and especially to France.

Lestocq was of French extraction, the son of French exiled Protestants; but his whole bearing partook more of the general character of his compatriots than of that of his religious brethren. He had been originally in Peter the Great's own household; and it is said that he was dismissed by that Emperor on account of his unmitigated debauchery. The existence of any such squeamishness on the part of that monarch, may be doubted. A more probable conjecture is, that Peter had

discovered Lestocq's intriguing disposition and dangerous character; and that the debaucheries served as a pretext for dismissal—the more so as Lestocq had been admitted into the Princess Elizabeth's household in the same capacity as that which he had filled in her father's.

Lestocq's frivolous manners, his love of talking, and his careless mode of speaking about everything, were no doubt greatly in his favour, as a means of concealment for his dangerous designs. He was, however, greatly suspected by some of the ministers of the Grand Duchess Regent, and by the foreign ambassadors who were not in the interest of France. Between the French ambassador, La Chétardie, and Lestocq, there was great intimacy, and constant communication. The two conspirators took care never to meet either at the French ambassador's Palace, or at the Palace of the Princess Elizabeth; but they had some obscure place of meeting, in which a conspiracy was being formed to subvert the Duchess Regent, to alter the succession of the throne, and to place the Crown upon the head of the Princess Elizabeth.

In addition to these two devoted friends, the Princess had her own dissembling spirit; and she was profound in dissimulation.

The Duchess Regent, on the contrary, was an indolent, good-natured, placable woman, who, so long as she could shut herself up in her private apartments with her infant child and with her favourite, Juliana de Mengden, was contented to let the world go on very much as it pleased.

For the first few months after Biron's exile, the Duchess Regent and the Princess Elizabeth were apparently upon the best terms of har-

mony. Gradually, however, mutual distrust arose; and it might have raised the most serious suspicions in any other mind but that of the indolent Duchess Regent, to find that the Princess never went to see her, except upon days of ceremony, or when, from strict etiquette, she was obliged to pay some visit to the Court. Her presence at that Court was rendered more irksome and displeasing to her by reason of a project which had been formed by the reigning powers to unite the Princess in marriage to a brother of the Grand Duke of Brunswick.

In order to further the conspiracy, for Elizabeth had now determined to conspire, money was wanting, and this the French ambassador liberally supplied. He was also most useful in guiding Lestocq, with whom he had many secret conferences.

The aim of the conspirators was, that the revolution should be caused by the soldiery; and the Princess Elizabeth began by gaining over several of the soldiers of the Preobrajenski regiment. Her principal agent in this matter was a man of better education than most of his fellows. His name was Grunstein. He had been a merchant, had become bankrupt, and had enlisted in the Preobrajenski regiment. By degrees he gained over twenty-nine other Grenadiers to become members of the plot.

The ambassadors of the great Powers, who were hostile to France, or who, at any rate, did not take the same view of Russian affairs as the French ambassador, did not fail to warn the Duchess Regent of her danger.

Lestocq was a giddy, vain man; and he had been heard to say, on some occasion, at a café,

that there would soon be seen great changes in St. Petersburg. Count Ostermann, who was well supplied with intelligence by his spies, reported this talk to the Duchess Regent, who, however, only laughed at it. It cannot be said that the conspiracy was well managed. There were now many persons having strong suspicions that such a project was on foot; and, besides, anything that is absolutely confided to more than two or three human beings, cannot well be called a secret.

Still the Princess Elizabeth delayed to strike a bold stroke; and, indeed, when it was pressed upon her to do so, she always found some good reason for delay. At length, however, it was resolved, with her consent, that on the 6th of January, 1742 (Twelfth Day, when all the troops in garrison at St. Petersburg are paraded on the ice of the Neva), the deed should be done. The Princess was to go there, and was to make a speech to her regiment of Preobrajenski, declaring her claim to the Empire. They would no doubt receive this speech with acclamation; the other regiments would follow their example; and thus the conspiracy was sure to be successful.

This determination was taken at least a month before it was to be put into execution; but certain events occurred which greatly tended to confirm the resolve of the Princess Elizabeth, and to hasten her action. It was about this time that she learnt that the Grand Duchess had been advised to declare herself Empress. It was also about this time that certain regiments stationed at St. Petersburg were ordered to join the army in Sweden. In these regiments were many adherents to the cause of the Princess.

Neither, however, of these important and untoward circumstances would probably have sufficed to make the Princess act swiftly and resolutely, as long as the Grand Duchess herself did not make a move in the game. She was repeatedly warned of the existence of some conspiracy. The Marquis De Botta, ambassador from the Queen of Hungary, addressed her in these solemn words :—" Your Imperial Highness has declined assisting the Queen my mistress, notwithstanding the alliance between the two Courts ; but as there is now no remedy for that, I hope that, with the assistance of God, and of our other allies, we shall get out of our difficulties : but, at least, madam, do not at present neglect the taking care of yourself. You are on the brink of a precipice. In the name of God, save yourself ! Save the Emperor ! Save your husband ! "

Even these emphatic words seem to have produced little or no impression, at the time, on the torpid mind of the Grand Duchess who remained perfectly inert.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER II.

SCENES AT THE PREOBRAJENSKI CAFÉ.

It was in the depth of winter at St. Petersburg, and the time was evening, when a middle-aged gentleman might be seen making his way on foot through some back streets to a low kind of *café*, which was situated on the banks of the Neva.

He did not seem the kind of person who would be likely to frequent such places of amusement. His furs were of the costliest, and his dress altogether was particularly well cared-for. He walked with a jaunty air, and dandled his cane in such a dainty fashion as might have given our great poet Pope the idea of Sir Plume.

“ Sir Plume of amber snuff-box justly vain,
And the nice conduct of a clouded cane.”

Notwithstanding his jaunty air, this fine gentleman did not seem thoroughly at ease. He walked down the middle of the streets, and fre-

quently turned to see whether any one was following him. Then he would gaily hum a French air, and recommence his walk. Except on account of this occasional manifestation of suspicious vigilance, he would not in the least degree have fulfilled the idea which most men have of a conspirator—certainly not of a most dangerous conspirator. Good Heavens! upon what insignificant people the greatest affairs of this world often turn, as upon a pivot. The future destiny of Russia was to be much affected by this man, and even by his proceedings this evening. Changes of dynasty, changes of policy, Crimean wars, and other events still more important, were trembling in the balance; and it was for this man, unconsciously, to decide which way the balance should incline.

It was Lestocq, whose position in the household of Elizabeth and whose part in the projected conspiracy have been already described.

After many turnings and windings, the light-hearted French gentleman found his way to the café, and entered it. At the moment he entered, there was one of those curious contests in song, not uncommon among the Russian peasants and artisans, in which, indeed, men of a higher station were glad to join, sometimes as listeners, and sometimes even as competitors for the prize.

At that moment a peasant was singing a song of a rustic kind, representing the charms of the country, and his own sorrow at the falseness of his Arina. Rendered in prose, it ran thus:—

None of this noise, and turmoil and hurry: none!
No darkness of tall streets, and tumult of waggons: none!
But peace on the hills, and peace in the valleys,

Peace by the sunny stream that silently glides on ;
In the isba* is rest too, the bees round it humming.

Sweeter than all is the mid-day sleep in the forest,
By my side Arina watching ;
I awake, and find my Arina.

Broad are the heavens there, and the sky is wide open,
But not broad enough for the sorrow of men to be lost in.
Hearts are sad by Lena the still, as in Moscow the
 noiseful.

My tears flow with the river,
My sighs are borne upon the breeze ;
No bird so sorrowfully sings
As with me to partake of my sorrow.

Sadder than all is the mid-day sleep in the forest.
The false one no more by me watching ;
I awake, but Arina is not there.
 No, no, never more,
 Never more, Arina.

After the song had ended, there was a sound of applause ; and while it was being decided who should be the next singer, and suggestions were being made from all parts of the room as to what he should sing, Lestocq took aside a gloomy-looking man, dressed as a corporal of the Preobrajenski regiment, and conversed earnestly with him. This was Grunstein.

Snatches of the conversation might have been heard. For instance, Lestocq spoke frequently of a certain high festival of the Russians, called the Consecration of the Waters of the Neva, which was to occur in about a month's time.

"Too late, too late," muttered the gloomy Grunstein. "We are ready if you are. Why this delay ?"

The replies of Lestocq, which were uttered in

* *Isba*, a cottage.

a soothing tone, seemed to point out that some woman's irresolution was the cause of the delay; and the gay Frenchman broke out in a louder tone into a general invective against women, which was overheard, and was laughingly assented to by many male voices, for there were very few women present.

Then began the song of the next singer, a humble lay, but sung with great feeling. It began thus:—

Far off in the forest rose the wreaths of smoke,
While sweetly a voice the glad echoes awoke;
'Twas Netka sitting by the flames so bright,
Her dark hair glowed in the yellow light;
And ever as she sang,
The woods around her rang;
And from the trees above,
The nightingale and dove
Now listened as entranced,
And now the melody enhanced,
For the song was love, love, love.

After the song had ended, there was again a pause, while a new rival was sought for to the two preceding contenders for the prize.

During the interval several privates of the Preobrajenski regiment (this café was a favourite haunt of theirs) gathered round Lestocq and Grunstein; and there was much gesticulation, and much dissatisfaction expressed by these soldiers, which, evidently, Lestocq and Grunstein sought to allay. Then came a song sung by one who seemed to be of a better station than that of the preceding singers. The words of the song appeared to be such as would have been more suitable to a more refined audience. This was the first stanza.

Whate'er in life that's beautiful I see,
Heroic deed, or noble word,
The triumph of the pen or sword,
I think of thee.
These are but images to me,
Full of thy beauteous memory.

This song was vociferously applauded ; and it was evident, that if the audience had then had to adjudge the prize, this singer would have gained it. He, however, while there was much noisy dispute as to who should be the next singer, stole away, and was probably afterwards never recognized as the great singer who became the first tenor at the opera, and was eventually celebrated not only in Russia, but throughout Europe. He had come, from a strange fancy to see whether he could sway that audience, before he made his *debut* at the Opera ; and he went away very well satisfied with his success.

It was generally felt by the company, that the soldiers should now do something to distinguish themselves, and should not merely be listeners.

To say the truth, the artisans and peasants thought that they should have an easy victory, for it was two of their especial favourites who had hitherto come forward, and it was now noticed that the third singer had left the room.

After some whispering amongst the soldiers, a young man of the regiment was made to come forward, not without some reluctance on his part. It might have been noticed, that both Lestocq and Grunstein were much averse to any song being sung by a soldier ; but they were not able to control the wishes of the other men of the Preobrajenski regiment and of the general company.

The song which the young soldier sang, was rather a vague affair, enumerating at some length the various merits and graces of the Princess Elizabeth. The military poet who composed it, had not confined his genius within narrow bounds. The burden of it, however, was sufficiently inspiring, and, certainly very distinct and outspoken.

Petrovna, our darling, the friend of the brave,
The foe of all those who would Russia enslave;
To thee our hopes have fled,
For thee our blood we'll shed,
Thy enemies, we'll strike them dead,
Petrovna, our darling, the friend of the brave!

It is not surprising that Lestocq and Grunstein should have endeavoured to prevent the singing of this song, which went so far to disclose their wishes and their purposes. It was amusing, however, to note the different characters of the two men. Grunstein maintained a moody silence, looking more morose than ever, whereas the genial Frenchman could only maintain his reticence during the refrain of the first verse, but joined in it most heartily and loudly when it came to be sung in chorus the second time.

After a little more of whispered conference between the two principal conspirators, Lestocq took his departure from the café; and when again in the frosty air, might still be heard humming, in lower tones, the refrain:

"To thee our hopes have fled,
"For thee our blood we'll shed,
"Thy enemies, we'll strike them dead,
"Petrovna, our darling, the friend of the brave!"

The only prudence shown by this most jovial of conspirators was, that he made an immense

circuit, going up and down various streets needlessly, as if he had lost his way, before he ventured to enter, by a little gate at the riverside, the palace of his mistress, the Princess Elizabeth.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER III.

IVAN'S CONDITION ON HIS RETURN TO ST. PETERS-
BURG—THE GYPSIES—IVAN MEETS AZRA.

IN the meanwhile, was there no person besides the government spies, their ministerial employers, and the foreign ambassadors hostile to France, who was well aware of this conspiracy, and most anxious to thwart it? To answer this question, it is necessary to revert to the eventful story of the life of Ivan de Biron.

A miserable creature is an animal that has lost its master and its way, and is wandering about the streets of a great town, exhausting itself by fruitless efforts to discover whom and what it has lost. Another deplorable being, is one, who, in a strange land, is friendless, and does not know the language. There was a man in such a position, a clever self-reliant man when at home, who sat down upon the steps of a cathedral and fairly wept. For, as he told his friends when he got home, he felt like a wild beast. But neither of these sad conditions is much more, if at

all more, wretched than that of a man, who, returning from exile, finds that all his former friends have partaken his fate, and that all his acquaintances shun him as being still "suspect."

This last condition was that of Ivan, on his return from Siberia. The members of the Biron family, and the principal adherents of the, banished Duke of Courland, were still in exile, or were imprisoned in the Imperial fortresses. To whatever house Ivan directed his steps, he found strange faces at the door, and learnt that the former occupants were bereft of home, and fortune. Common acquaintances endeavoured to avoid recognizing him; and, when obliged to do so, passed quickly by on the other side.

A small sum of money had been given him immediately upon his being brought back by his escort to St. Petersburg; but no further notice was taken of him by the government, and he was left to find his own living as best he might.

It was in a most disconsolate mood, that Ivan roamed about the streets of that city; or, as sometimes happened, stayed all day long in his miserable lodgings, cowering over his stove, and thinking, what must be the end for him, when his small resources should be exhausted. Employment of any kind he could not obtain. His woe-begone appearance went much against him, especially as he could give no satisfactory account of his antecedents, and had a very lame story to tell, when asked about his former employment, and his former master. Once trusting to the good-natured face of an employer, Ivan had told the true story of his former

life. It was to a printer, who was sometimes employed by government. This man's good-nature vanished instantly. He absolutely shuddered with affright, and bade Ivan quit the place directly. "A Biron indeed! I wonder at his audacity. I hope that nobody saw him enter." Ivan, for several days, was too much disheartened to make any further effort of this kind. Starvation came nearer and nearer to him.

One evening, not long after his interview with the master-printer, Ivan, still wandering, aimlessly, about the streets, was attracted by the sound of music, and entered the café before described as the favourite haunt of the Preobrazhenski regiment. It was that very evening when Lestocq visited the café; and Ivan was a witness of all the strange proceedings that went on during that night. These proceedings could not fail to make much impression upon one, who had been employed as the Duke of Courland's private secretary, who had been versed in unravelling conspiracies, and who had been accustomed daily to receive the reports of Biron's secret police.

From the café, Ivan went into the streets. He did not care to go home early. His lodgings, indeed, were little of a home for him; and he passed more and more of his time as the vagabonds in great towns pass theirs. He began to be nearly as well-informed as they are, of the nooks of shelter which are so serviceable to them; and, when taking refuge with other vagabonds from a sudden snow-storm, under the portico of some palace which in former days, he had, perhaps, entered as a guest, he would say to himself with bitter irony: "Benevolent beings, these nobles!

they doubtless built these porticoes for us." His young blood resisted the fearful coldness of that season; and, indeed, there was a fever in his veins—a fever bred of ruined hopes, of hopeless love, of disappointed ambition—which made him almost insensible to external influences.

There was a great party that night at the Winter Palace; and, in an open space between the palace and the Neva, there was a small crowd of people watching the arrival of the sledges. However cold it may be, there will be women of the lower classes anxious to see how women of the higher classes are dressed. The gypsies, from whom no festivities could be concealed, were in this open space; and it happened that they were the same band of gypsies which had given to the disguised Duke of Courland that information by their significant songs, which, if it had added to the wariness, as it did to the despondency of the Duke, would have preserved him from his downfall.

The beautiful Azra recognized Ivan; and the girl's heart was full of pity for him.

It must be recollected that, as said before, no persons of that time were better acquainted with political events, both those which had happened, and those which were likely to happen, as these bands of fortune-telling gypsies. They were a kind of police, acting for themselves, desirous of information solely that they might impose upon their dupes; and their intelligence, gained without any party prejudice, for they were strangers in the land, and despised equally all parties in the State, was often more trustworthy than the reports which were made to the authorities by hirelings.

It would have greatly shocked Lestocq and the

astute French ambassador, La Chétardie, if they could have known that they were hardly more cognizant of all the details of their projected conspiracy, than were these almost outlaws, the gypsies. It might have rendered the Princess Elizabeth less inclined to waver in her decision, if she, too, had been made aware of this fact.

It may appear surprising, that the knowledge, possessed by such persons, should not have been made more direct use of by them for their own purposes. But these outlawed beings had the greatest aversion to connecting themselves in any way with any transaction which might bring them within the clutches of the law. They had uniformly found that whenever they had concerned themselves with such transactions, their part in them had been to suffer from the knout and the rack; and that no gratitude had been displayed in return for any information they had given. They were an empire within an empire; and, as a general rule, their fealty to their own chiefs prevented any of the minor persons taking independent action.

On this evening the gypsies sang many of their favourite songs—songs adapted to the class of persons by whom they were surrounded. The usual business of fortune-telling went on; and Azra, as before, being a general favourite with the lower orders at St. Petersburg, was sent out of the gypsy circle by the chief, to take a prominent part in the proceedings.

She, without any direction from the chief, singled out Ivan, and sought to be allowed to tell him his fortune. The youth, influenced by the idleness of the moment, and also being curious to see whether the girl would repeat the story of

his future fortunes in the same words which she had used on the former occasion, crossed her palm with one of the few coins still left to him; and was prepared to listen, not without a certain anxiety, for Ivan was not free from the superstitions of his time and his nation, to what she would tell him. He thought to himself "what can she invent to mitigate the fortunes of such an outcast wretch as I am? She will not remember me."

Now Azra did not know who Ivan was, but she did remember him, and she recollected that he had been in the company of the Duke of Courland on that eventful day when they had sought to give his Highness a warning of his coming fate. It surprised her much to find that Ivan was still in the land of the living, or, at least, that he was not partaking the exile to which she and all her tribe knew well that the Duke of Courland had been condemned. She had often found herself thinking, with pity, of this young man, wondering what his fate had been, and how he had borne it. She augured favourably, to some extent, of the young man's fortunes, from the fact of his being at St. Petersburg; but, at the same time, with the quick apprehensiveness of her race, she noted the signs of depression, almost of despair, which were clearly visible in his countenance. Moreover, the general air of poverty and neglect, which his dress and personal appearance manifested, were not lost upon her.

She began by telling him the usual story, the one familiar to the skilled tellers of fortunes; and in substance, though not in words, it was very nearly the same that she had told before. Then in figurative language, she said that the sky was darkened with black clouds, and that it almost touched the earth—his earth; and that there

was no room for the light of love and joy between the black clouds and one whom they thus overshadowed. Still, she maintained, that, though there was much adversity in the present moment, and the line of trouble had become much stronger, all hindrances would in the end be overcome; that he would be a great man (here she paused for some moments); and that, when he was this great man, he would never think more of the poor gypsy girl who now held his hand in hers, and commanded the stars for him. "But," she said, "if you would assure that fortune, you must meet me to-morrow morning, on the bridge near St. Isaac's Church, at six o'clock. I will tell you something, it may be only a dream, which will give you back friends and fortune, and love, and everything. You will come?" His eyes said, "Yes." Thereupon she withdrew hastily into the circle; and the gypsies sang that choral song, which was a never-failing favourite with the people of Russia, the burden of which runs thus:—

Laugh who that may,
Play, let him play,
Drink, drink away;
For to-morrow,
May come sorrow;
Then lose not, and fret not
The joys of to-day.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER IV.

AZRA'S LOVE.

IVAN shared the prejudices of those amongst whom he had been brought up; and he looked upon the gypsies as a hostile race, specially inimical to all persons who had settled pursuits in his adopted country. But there was something in the young gypsy's earnestness which had deeply affected him; and, besides, he said to himself, "I am a vagabond now, and must not scorn fellowship with other vagabonds."

On the ensuing morning, he was the first to make his appearance on the bridge, which had been the appointed place of interview.

Love at first sight is not a thing unknown in any country or in any class. It is not betraying, unkindly, the sentiments of Azra, to admit that during a sleepless, watchful night, she had felt somewhat of a strange and unaccustomed feeling, which, if not first love, might at least be called first liking, for the young man whose manifest

depression had, at the outset, only excited her pity. She would have given much, had much been in her power to give, that that part of her fortune-telling, should not have been true, which made Ivan already in love with another girl. "I am sure," she said to herself, "she is very unkind to him, or he would not look so miserable. I hate her. Still, I will give him that intelligence which may ensure his welfare."

The poor girl even pictured to herself, how she would join with the others in singing the bride-song under his window, when he should marry the young Russian lady whom she feared he was in love with, but still had some hope that counter-acted that fear.

Ivan had not been three minutes on the bridge, before Azra made her appearance. The clock of a neighbouring church had just struck six; and not a human being was visible, either in the precincts of the church, or in the adjacent square of the Admiralty, but this young man and this young maiden. The magnificent church of St. Isaac's and the long buildings of the Admiralty, came forth distinctly to view. The golden dome of the one, and the golden spire of the other, rose up against the blue vault of heaven, and shone with brilliancy; for, early as it was, the moonlight, reflected from the clear sky above and from the bright snowy plains below, equalled the hazy beams of the risen sun as seen at mid-day in the cities of other northern climes we know of.

After the first greeting, Azra said timidly, "Was it all true then that I told you?"

"How can I tell, my dear?" Ivan replied. "It is not for me to foresee the future, but for you."

"Ah! But about the past?"

"I cannot say that it was altogether untrue."

The gypsy girl shuddered, but in a moment excused herself, saying, "We come from the East you know, from warmer, truer suns; and your northern air bites us strangers more spitefully than it does you."

Then she left him, and walked up and down by the frozen river-side, looking at the ice-bound Neva wistfully, as if it knew the secrets of men's and women's hearts, and might, if not controlled, betray hers.

This poor girl felt something now, which, heretofore, had been totally foreign to her. The young men of her tribe had sought her love in their rude way; but she had repelled their advances with a feeling alike of disgust and apprehension. Marriage, as seen among the elders of her tribe, had not presented itself to her in a very favourable light. In a word, she had not hitherto known what love was. In a moment she had felt it, or something very like it, for this stranger; and those depths of affection, which are covered over by a thin crust in every woman's soul, were disclosed. And she looked down into them, as it were; and knew, with the quick perception of that Orient race, that she loved this youth; and that, as she then thought, life for her without him would be desolation.

One question more, returning to the bridge, she asked; and it was a bold one: "Does *she* love you?"

Not even when sharply taken to task by his imperious master, not in the whole course of his official life, had Ivan ever felt that so difficult a question had been put to him.

Azra looked up into his face, as if she expected a plain and direct answer to this simple question;

and, though he saw an expression in her eyes, which almost forbade him from answering the question truthfully, and though it is a bold thing to declare that any woman loves you, he did muster up courage to answer truthfully, and to say, "I think she does : I do believe she does."

The eyes of Azra sank beneath his gaze ; and, after a moment, she left him again, and walked two or three times up and down by the banks of the Neva.

What great resolves are rapidly taken by us much-suffering mortals ! All that the greatest thinker of our times has said about "renunciation," and about its being the greatest feat of which human nature is capable, was imaged forth, and illustrated by the thoughts which then passed through the innocent mind of that gypsy girl. We may live with the coarsest surroundings, as this poor child had done ; but the great trials, the great conflicts of human existence, lie before the humblest and the poorest, as well as before the most self-sufficing and the grandest of the human race.

The gypsy girl looked upwards, as if to derive some guidance from those stars, which she believed concerned themselves so much with human affairs, even with such poor affairs as her own. Her gaze was not a prolonged one ; and a few minutes only had passed, before she had come to the determination to make one of those sacrifices of self, which great poets celebrate in their finest verses, but which the self-sacrificers mostly conceal in their own breasts, thus completing the sacrifice by silence. She had resolved, at her own great peril, to give him fully that intelligence which yesterday she had only intended to hint at, and which would make his fortune at the Russian

Court, and give to his arms that other girl whom she, her rival, would not, and could not believe would ever love him as she did.

The enormous danger which she ran from divulging, without the permission of her chief, any of the secrets possessed by her tribe, did not weigh much with her, so thoroughly had all-powerful love conquered selfish fear. The trial for her had been ~~won~~ ^{when} she thought that the young man's fortune thus assured, would also ensure the triumph of his love—for another.

Again she approached Ivan, and, after looking cautiously around, she conveyed to him in a few whispered sentences the information, already known to our readers, of the conspiracy that was already so far advanced towards its final issue.

Ivan, at first, affected not to believe her story. She reminded him of the truthfulness and the deep meaning of those hints which their tribe had darkly given to his companion, the Duke of Courland, on the first occasion of their meeting.

She also added such further details, that Ivan could no longer affect to doubt the truth of her intelligence. And it was finally agreed between them, that she should keep him well-informed of all that was going on, and, for that purpose, should meet him on the following day at the same hour, and at the same place.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER V.

IVAN'S PROJECTS.

THIS chapter must begin with the correction of a statement that was made in a preceding one. It was stated that Ivan had been present at the Preobrajenski Café on the same evening that Lestocq was there. Further consideration shows that this could hardly have been the case. Ivan was at the café more than once; but a comparison of the dates would almost prove that he could not have been there on that special occasion, for he had several interviews with Azra after the first one, and these must have occurred some days before Lestocq's visit to the café. At any rate Ivan's suspicions could not have been first aroused by what he saw and heard at that café.

The perplexity into which Ivan's mind was thrown by Azra's intelligence, was extreme. What course should he take? Which cause should he adopt? He had no longer the slightest doubt of the existence of the plot; and

that, one way or other, it would come to a final issue in a few days' time. Already skilled, far beyond what might have been expected from his youthfulness, in the tortuous ways of Russian policy and Russian conspiracy, he clearly foresaw that either the Duchess Regent, or the Princess Elizabeth, would be forced into immediate action. To which side should he incline? On the one hand he knew, perhaps better than any other man in St. Petersburg, that the relations between the Duke of Courland and the Princess Elizabeth had always been of an amicable character. Powerful as the Duke's influence had been with the late Empress, it had not been potent enough to guide her entirely as to her conduct towards the other members of the Imperial family. Had it been otherwise, it is by no means improbable that the Princess Elizabeth would, at an early period, have been chosen by the Empress as her successor to the throne,—at a period earlier at least than that when the Czarina began to show favour to the House of Brunswick.

If, therefore, Ivan should make up his mind to betray the plot to the Duchess Regent, he might be greatly injuring the Duke of Courland's interests, and indeed preventing his recall. However much Ivan may have feared his master in former days, and however little he may have trusted the Duke's graciousness, when he was gracious to his private secretary, Ivan thought it would be a sin to be untrue to his master in the days of his adversity.

What effect either course might have upon the fortunes of the Princess Marie's family, he could not determine in his mind. But upon the whole he thought that any change

in the ruling powers could not be unfavourable to them.

On the other hand, gratitude impelled him strongly to take the side of the Duchess Regent, to whose especial kindness he thought he owed his own return from exile.

It is very seldom that any human being, when placed in difficult circumstances, is driven by one single simple motive to adopt a definite course of action. Without in the least detracting from the influence which a feeling of gratitude excited in the mind of this young man, he perhaps might have remained inactive, but for the following consideration. He began to think, as some observers at the time thought, and as many historians since have thought, until they came to the catastrophe, that a plot so weakly contrived, must fail.

"And then," said Ivan to himself, "if I take that side, I shall have gained no advantage for the Duke of Courland or for my loved friends in Siberia. The thing will fail. I feel almost sure that it will. Did I feel otherwise, I could hardly resolve upon action. A plot known to the gypsies; talked over, for so I can see it is, by those common soldiers at the café, when half drunk; a plot constructed by that gabbling Frenchman, Lestocq!—Count Ostermann must be strangely altered if he fail to find it out. I must be quick, whatever I decide to do."

As he thus reasoned with himself, he arrived at a final result. It was nightfall then; but he resolved to go next morning to the Winter Palace, and to seek an audience with the Duchess Regent.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER VI.

MAVRA SCHEPELOF AND HER MISTRESS.

THE chief conspirator, Lestocq, now comes again upon the scene. When last mentioned, he had just returned from his visit to the café, and had entered the palace of the Princess Elizabeth.

In a richly-furnished room of that palace, there sat two ladies. One was a tall and beautiful young woman, with somewhat severe features, of what is called a classical type. She was Mavra Schepelof, the first lady-in-waiting to the Princess Elizabeth, and was greatly beloved by her. The other was the Princess Elizabeth herself. This royal lady is well worth describing, being a person who played a large part in the world's history. She was eminently handsome, having much of the beauty of her Empress-Mother Catharine, the wife of Peter the Great. Good humour, voluptuousness, wit and intellectual ability, were all depicted in her countenance. It was, however, more marked and

impressive than quite beseems what is most beautiful in woman. Her dress was very remarkable. She was enveloped in a kind of cloak, trimmed with lace, as well as with the richest furs. Had it not been for the lace, you might almost have supposed it to be a man's cloak; and certainly, whenever the cloak was a little thrown aside by any gesture more animated than usual, a mode of attire appeared beneath, which was, in all respects, decidedly masculine. She wore a sort of tunic which well became the outlines of a form which was graceful, though it must be allowed to have been of rather too ample a development.

That very day the English ambassador, in writing home to his government, had informed them, that the power of the Duchess Regent was becoming more and more secure. Indeed, he said, there was but little to fear from the Princess Elizabeth, for she was too stout to be a conspirator; and the ambassador confirmed his opinion by quoting Shakespeare, who also had pronounced that there was little danger to be apprehended from the machinations of fat people.

It may be remarked how much these ambassadors indulge in quotations from Shakespeare—thereby a little contradicting the popular theory, that Addison re-introduced Shakespeare to the English reading world. This ambassador—a man of Addison's own age—was not likely to have been influenced in his early studies by anything that Addison ever wrote.

His Excellency would have been delighted to have overheard the conversation which ensued between these two ladies; and the despatch which

he would afterwards have written, would have contained still more convincing proofs of the permanence of the existing government in Russia.

The conversation of the two ladies had hitherto turned upon somewhat frivolous subjects, such as the dress of the Duchess Regent, of her favourite, Juliana de Mengden, and the presents which had lately been given, in the name of the infant Emperor, to the Princess Elizabeth on her birthday. This talk was interrupted by a knock at the door, when a page entered and said that Monsieur Lestocq desired to have the honour of an audience with her Highness.

"Let him wait," said the Princess; with which message the page retired.

"Do not look so vexed, dear Mavra. I know what the man has come to say. He has said it a hundred times before, as you well know; and I have made the same reply a hundred times."

"Is your Highness then prepared to marry that hump-backed fright, the Duchess's brother-in-law?"

"No, dear Mavra, I decline to marry any man, whether he be as frightful as some of my ancestors must have been, if they have not been belied by the Court painters (and that I hardly think is likely), or as beautiful as that Apollo in the corridor. No man shall have it in his power to tyrannize over me."

"Does your Highness mean to endure the slights that are put upon you from day to day by these upstarts—you, the real heiress of Russia? Do you mean to let all State affairs go on without your having any voice in them?"

"Mavra, my dear, you should have been the Princess ; and I should have been the first lady-in-waiting. What an Empress, by the way, you would have made ! A good face, too, for a coin ! Here, now, there is some dignity of form and feature."

"Your Highness is pleased to mock me."

"No, my child, I am not mocking you."

"And what a good change it would have been for me—what a lady-in-waiting I should have made ! So good humoured, so placable, so easily to be managed by any other woman. Now, Mavra, confess : have I not a better temper than any of you ? I should make the Princess of Ladies-in-waiting. I never pout when I am ordered to do anything that is disagreeable—except just a little when I have to go to Court, and play the hypocrite to that stupid woman, and her still more stupid favourite, and to admire, with becoming reverence, that Imperial Infant, 'the sweetest and most intelligent little creature that ever breathed.'"

Here the Princess burst into a hearty masculine kind of laugh, in which her companion did not join.

"And so it won't laugh, won't it ? Its head is full of State affairs. State affairs ! Mavra, I will tell you a great secret. These State affairs that men talk about are the greatest farce in the world. If men only cared to talk to me about State affairs, I should not care to listen to them so readily as my enemies say that I am prone to do.

"Since my good father's death, the State affairs that seem such grand things to you, have chiefly been, as far as my poor intelligence has discovered, that one great man is sent to Siberia

with a round following of his henchmen, and another great man, with his slaves and flatterers, comes up and takes the vacant place. These are great State affairs. But I have forgotten—there are the coats. These garments play a large part in State affairs. Stars and crosses are pulled off certain coats, and are put upon others.

“Believe me, Mavra, there is nothing worth having like a quiet life, with a little love, occasionally, to sweeten it. In love there may be variety, else it becomes a dull affair, to my thinking. Don’t look so shocked, my dear: your Feodor and you, are to be changeless turtle-doves, I know, and to coo, and coo, and coo, as unrelentingly as those most tiresome of feathered bipeds.”

And this was the woman, speaking at this moment, probably without any disguise, and showing her real character, who afterwards, though reluctantly, kept a great part of Europe in a state of constant turmoil; and whose administration of foreign affairs tended largely to increase and consolidate the power of Russia.

The favourite reminded the Princess that Lestocq was waiting.

“I will see him now, my dear—this great statesman who wishes to administer his potions to the body politic; and is ready to do so with as much confidence in his own skill, and as little fear of consequences, as when he plays the part of doctor to our household. We, however, have seldom cared to avail ourselves of his skill.”

“Your Highness must make mirth out of all of us who have the happiness to attend upon you; but I would that you would listen to him

less or more; for I am sure that you are in great peril while you hesitate. May I leave you?"

The Princess, with a sigh, gave her consent. Mavra Schepelof withdrew; and shortly afterwards Lestocq entered the apartment.

It was with a very grave aspect and with much reverence that Lestocq approached the Princess, and stood in front of her.

"My good Lestocq," exclaimed the Princess, "are any of your patients recovering from their medicines, that you come hither with such grave and sour looks, which ill become you? What is it, man?"

"All is ready, please your Highness; and when I have said all is ready, it means that there is not a day to be lost. From readiness to ripeness, from ripeness to rottenness, there is but a small interval in these affairs."

"The similitude is not savoury, but the aphorism is worthy of the gravity of the Chancellor himself. You must have been talking lately with the wise Count Ostermann—the man who is always ill at the right time. Cure him of that, Lestocq, cure the fox of his cunning, if you can."

"I should know something about him," Lestocq replied. "I am mostly followed by his spies. But hear me, Princess. Do, for once, hear me, and believe your faithful friend and servant. I have come from the café of the soldiers. Your friends there are most impatient. Grunstein declares that it is madness to wait. La Chétardie says so too."

"France, I know, is deeply interested in the good government of Russia," said the Princess.

"Your partisans, madam, in the Preobra-

jenski regiment, are devoted to you. But how can you rely for a moment on their prudence? These common fellows must talk."

"And some others too, Lestocq."

"And they have wives and sweethearts."

"Aye: I warrant me they have," said the Princess. "That is not a point upon which I am doubtful."

"And the Cuirassiers are ordered to Sweden. I told you, before, that other regiments had been sent."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Princess, whose countenance suddenly changed, "that is something serious. Next to the Preobrajenskis, they are our best friends. Think you, Lestocq, that that is the reason why they are sent away from St. Petersburg?"

"Not a doubt of it: and, madam, is it not a childish fancy (if I may say so), which has fixed upon the 'Consecration of the Waters' as the day for our attempt, merely because it is a day of festival, which may serve their purposes as well as ours? I do not see why we should desire to have many people in the streets on our day. That day must be advanced."

"We will see about it," said the Princess.

Lestocq shrugged his shoulders in a most emphatic manner, and muttered discontentedly to himself the Princess's words, "We will see about it."

"I tell you, Lestocq, I like not the thing. I marvel at myself that I have ever let you go so far. It seems a baseness, to be plotting against this child; and, as for the woman herself, she more amuses me than wounds me." Then, after a pause, she said, "To-day I go to Court. I'll

mark them well. To-morrow, we will speak further on the matter."

"To-morrow," repeated Lestocq in a mournful tone.

"I would be alone now, Lestocq." So saying she waved her hand gracefully. Lestocq bowed, and withdrew.

He had hardly quitted the room, before the expression of the Princess's face entirely changed. There was now something in it of the stern look of her father: something, too, of the sorrowful look of her mother in her later years. The Princess threw aside the robe which she had kept closely round her while Lestocq was in the room; and, with slow step, paced up and down the apartment.

The English ambassador might well say, as he does in a letter to his Court, that it would be desirable for the British Government to send the Princess the Order of the Garter, as it would certainly have found a fitting wearer, and would seldom have been seen to more advantage. It was not unwise, too, of the shrewd ambassador to have added, that they had also better send a far better-looking and far younger man than he could pretend to be, to represent them at this Court.

"I like it not," she said; "the more I think of it, the less I like it. I doubt not I could rule a little better than these foolish people; but enough of blood has been shed by our House, and for it. I am not a good woman: at least, according to their empty moralities, I am not such; but I would not have the death of any single human being on my soul. Should I be forced to take this step (and they are all in my power, a word from me condemns them) during

my reign there shall be no executions. If tame and uneventful, at any rate it shall be bloodless. Why talk of my reign? I will not reign. We'll see, though; we'll see. If they push me to the precipice, it is not Peter's daughter who will be thrust over it, or not alone, not alone. They shall all go with me."

The Princess continued for some time muttering indistinct sentences of a similar kind to those which she had spoken loudly; and then, calling for her tiring women, she prepared to attend the Court on a day which proved very eventful as regards the destinies of Russia.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER VII.

THE GRAND DUCHESS HAS A PRIVATE INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCESS ELIZABETH.

It was a grand day at the Russian Court ; and the scene, if not looked at too closely, was magnificent in the extreme. The splendour that the Duke of Courland had introduced, suffered no abatement during the new reign ; and the Court presented a very different appearance from that which the Princess Elizabeth had been accustomed to in her early days, during the reign of her rude and boisterous father, Peter the Great.

Even now, however, to the eyes of a fastidious Frenchman, and many such were present on this occasion, there was much that provoked criticism. There was not anything in all its parts complete. If a man was otherwise well-dressed, that important part of his costume, the wig, was neither what it should have been, nor worn as it should have been. As for the dress of the ladies, the material was often of gold brocade, or of some other rich material ; but, as

Lestocq did not fail to remark to a compatriot, "there was a total absence of fine feeling in the composition. No poetry whatever!" A colour endurable enough in itself, though rather pronounced, was insulted by being placed in juxtaposition with some other bold colour, which could not possibly live on good terms with it. "And then the walk of the women! Only to be equalled in barbarism by the brutal manner in which the men thump their diamond snuff-boxes, and take snuff like clowns."

Such were the biting remarks of Lestocq, who almost felt that it was beneath his genius to concern himself with the politics of a people vainly endeavouring, as he said to himself, to conceal their native savagery by this awkward splendour. "The wolves wear the ermine they have stolen; but when the creatures move or utter sounds, the wolf in them is not less visible."

It was the custom at that Court for members of the Imperial Family to be received at their entrance by a flourish of trumpets. This was not omitted on the present occasion when the Princess Elizabeth entered the Winter Palace; and, indeed, she was received with marked cordiality by the Duchess Regent and her husband, the Grand Duke of Brunswick.

After the Princess had remained a short time in the circle, the Duchess Regent suddenly made a sign to her; and they withdrew together from the drawing-room to the Grand Duchess's private apartments.

It was with very anxious feelings that Lestocq, the French ambassador, La Chétardie, and Woronzow saw this movement of those two great personages. These men were the only persons present who were thoroughly aware how

far the Princess had gone in conspiracy, or at least in allowing conspiracy in her behalf, against the reigning powers.

The step thus taken by the Grand Duchess, of withdrawing herself and the Princess from the Court circle was a most unusual one; and, as to a conspirator even very slight circumstances are matters of no light concern, such an event at Court as this, was calculated to excite the most serious apprehensions in the minds of the guilty persons present.

When the two ladies had entered the Duchess Regent's cabinet, she lost no time in taxing the Princess with her conduct. The Regent told her frankly that, from various quarters, information had reached her of the Princess's proceedings. Lestocq, a member of her household, was in constant communication with the French ambassador; and it was well known that those two were carrying on the most dangerous intrigues. Hitherto, she, the Regent, had refused to give any credence to the information she had received; but if these treasonable practices continued, Lestocq must be arrested, and means would be taken to make him confess the truth.

The Princess in reply showed a power of dissembling which proved that she was well fitted to take a high position in that political world of dissimulation, in the midst of which she lived. She was innocence itself. Had she ever shown any ambitious desires? Nothing was further from her thoughts than to do anything which could injure the Duchess Regent, or that dear child, the infant Emperor. She trusted that she had too deep a sense of religion to break the oath of fealty she had taken. As for Lestocq,

he had never entered the French Ambassador's Palace. This statement was true to the letter; for, as it may be remembered, he had always carefully avoided doing so. However, the Princess added, Lestocq might be arrested if the Regent pleased. What he would confess, if he spoke truly, would only place his mistress's innocence in a stronger light. For her part, she knew that she had enemies, and that all these stories against her were told by them, in order to make her life miserable at Court.

While uttering these protestations she was deeply affected, and shed abundant tears. The good-natured Grand Duchess wept in sympathy; and the two great ladies returned into the drawing-room: the one believing that she had been listening to the reclamations of an innocent person who had been most wrongfully accused, and the other feeling that she had played her part of innocence very well; but that it could not often be played again. Moreover, she had that almost sickening sensation of great fear which comes upon most persons, when, by the merest hazard, or by great skill, a sudden danger has just been avoided by them, at which moment the sense of peril is perhaps the greatest.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER VIII.

PROGRESS OF THE CONSPIRACY.

WHEN the two great ladies returned to the drawing-room, it was with arms inter-linked, and seemingly in very loving converse with each other. It is almost needless to add that the eyes of every courtier were directed, either openly or furtively, to the countenances of the Princess and the Duchess Regent.

Even false tears leave distinct traces on the countenance; and that composure of mind, which enabled the Princess to command the expression of every feature, did not enable her to remove those tell-tale signs of recent tears, which betrayed the serious and affecting nature of the interview.

In a few moments it was thoroughly well known by experienced Russian courtiers, what kind of scene had been enacted. Those among them who had some inkling of the designs of the two chief conspirators, Lestocq and La Chétardie, quickly turned their eyes from the

countenances of the ladies, to the faces of these two men. They bore the inspection very well. The native gaiety of these two Frenchmen almost baffled, for the moment, the searching inquiries which were directed, not only to their looks, but to their whole demeanour.

It was a terrible evening for the Princess Elizabeth. Years afterwards she remembered how she had thought that the festivities of that night would never end. At last, however, they did end; and, after an affectionate parting with the Duchess Regent, the Princess, accompanied by her suite, returned to her own palace.

The suite, with one exception, were immediately dismissed; and then the Princess, beckoning Lestocq to accompany her, retired to her private apartments.

To him the Princess related, without reserve, all that had passed between her and the Duchess Regent. In the midst of her own terror and perplexity, she could not help being somewhat amused by the much greater terror manifested by Lestocq, especially when the Princess related to him how the Duchess Regent had intimated that it might be necessary to arrest Lestocq, and to ascertain that which torture might compel him to confess.

Lestocq, as might be imagined, was for instant action. He was very bold, intellectually speaking, as a conspirator; but that is by no means inconsistent with his having a very sincere and careful regard for the welfare of his own person. He was a little shocked, too, at finding that the Princess had made no objection whatever to his being arrested, and had, in fact, consented that this arrest should take place. It was in vain that the Princess

pointed out to him that any hesitation at that moment would have been absolutely fatal—would, in fact, have caused the instant death or banishment to Siberia, of all persons who were directly, or even remotely, concerned in this conspiracy—a conspiracy which had been so carelessly, and, if we may so express it, so disrespectfully conducted, that it might almost have been termed “an open secret.”

To all Lestocq's lamentations and entreaties—entreaties for instant action, that very night—the Princess paid no heed. Her simple reply was, “The good woman is sufficiently imposed upon by the bad woman, so far at any rate that the effect may be expected to last for the next twenty-four hours. Leave me, leave me now,” she exclaimed, “I will not resolve to-night what shall be done. To-morrow, come early : there shall be no more hesitation after this night. But now, go.”

Lestocq, though with a very unwilling mind, left the apartment.

It was a terrible night that the Princess passed on this occasion. Naturally of an indecisive temperament—of an easy-going, indolent, voluptuous disposition—and having only dormant in her the restless energy of that most restless of monarchs, her Father :—she had, hitherto, only played with this conspiracy. True it is, she had been vexed by the slights which she had met with, or fancied she had met with, at the hands of the new reigning powers. Moreover, it had been a serious grievance to her, that she should have been much pressed to marry the insignificant and deformed brother of the Duchess Regent's husband. This pressure was the more distasteful to her, as she was not without lovers, whom she regarded, according at least to the scandal of the

Court, with exceeding favour. She, however, knew that the people of Russia would never allow the daughter of Peter the Great to be forced into a marriage which was entirely repugnant to her, and which was so obviously meant to secure the interests of a German family, not at all too much loved either by the nobles or the common people of Russia.

The religious difficulty, however, was the one which weighed most with the Princess, throughout that anxious and sleepless night. She had sworn an oath of fealty to the infant Emperor; and whatever follies, or whatever severities the Duchess Regent might commit, either against herself, or against those who were devoted to her Imperial Highness, this oath that she had solemnly and deliberately taken, being perfectly aware of how much of her own rights she had given up by taking it, weighed upon her conscience.

It needs but little knowledge of history, to be convinced of the fact that religion may not relax its hold upon those persons, who seem the most to contradict its teachings. The Princess, was, doubtless, a most erring woman; and, with that singular candour of character which she possessed, she was but too well aware that she contradicted some of the ordinary precepts of morality. But, she ever held, that in matters of religion, she was a true and faithful servant of the Church. In the breast of such an orthodox and dutiful believer, what excuse could there be for perjury? Moreover, there seemed to her something very mean in conspiring against a mere child. She was exceedingly fond of children; and, though she ridiculed at times to her dependants the almost ludicrous devotion of the Regent Mother, and of

the whole Court to the little Ivan, the Princess had been fond of the child, and had been quite contented to abide the time, sixteen years hence, when he would be called to ascend the throne, and take the reins of government into his own hands. The people at present in power, she despised. The very conquest she had made, this evening, over the just fears of the Duchess Regent, had not diminished her contempt for that good-natured lady ; but, at the same time, had made the Princess feel how inglorious a thing it would be to supplant this good, innocent woman by sheer treason. The Princess imagined that she herself had no especial capacity for governing. How greatly this inadequate knowledge of her own powers would be contradicted, remained to be seen.

The result was, that the night was passed by her in stating and re-stating every conceivable argument that should induce her to decide one way or the other. Should she go at once to the Duchess Regent ; acknowledge frankly the extent to which the conspiracy had proceeded ; claim pardon for Lestocq, immunity for the French ambassador, La Chétardie ; and, then, as it were, disband the conspirators ? This was one course of action to which her thoughts inclined.

She felt, though, that for such a course to be successful, it was requisite that the other side should be equally generous with herself. It was characteristic of her sagacity, that she said to herself : " Small-minded people never understand large-hearted conduct ; and they will still continue to suspect me, however innocent I may be."

Finally, she resolved to determine nothing until she should again see, or hear from, those

who were considered to be her friends in St. Petersburg.

The Princess was right in supposing that she had twenty-four hours of safety. She had played her dissembling part so well that the Duchess Regent was perfectly convinced of her innocence. It was in vain that the Grand Duke endeavoured that very evening to persuade his wife to consent to the arrest of Lestocq, and to post additional piquets in the streets.

It is clear that the system of placing piquets in the streets, the abolition of which had given so much satisfaction when the Duke of Courland was deposed, had again been introduced, though probably not to so great an extent as in his time.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER IX.

LESTOCQ'S FINAL INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCESS ELIZABETH.

THE next morning, very early, Lestocq claimed an interview with the Princess. His fears throughout that night, had not by any means diminished. Visions of the knout and the rack had come most painfully before him. He knew full well that he was not one of that "noble army of martyrs," whom torture does not compel to betray their secrets, or even the secrets of other people. Indeed, it is very rare that any motive, other than that afforded by the solemn duty of holding to a religious belief, enables any man to endure the torments of skilled torture without renouncing the most cherished convictions, or betraying the most secret knowledge possessed by him.

At first, the conversation of this morning was very like that of the preceding evening. Lestocq urged immediate action. The Princess contended against his views. If action were to

be taken, why not keep to their original plan, and choose the festival of the "Consecration of the Waters of the Neva" as the day on which the conspiracy should break forth?

"You say," exclaimed the Princess, "and perhaps it is true, that I am beloved by the troops: you say, and I do not deny it, that I am beloved by the people. Then and there we can best learn whether their love for me is such as would, with the consent of all, place me upon the throne of my father."

As may be seen, the horrible state of indecision in which this great Princess had passed the night, still remained dominant upon her. She well knew that she was surrounded by adventurers. They risked but their bodies: she felt, devout as she really was, that she risked her soul. As a politician, thoroughly conversant with the intrigues of foreign courts, she knew that it was from no love of her that France, through her ambassador, was a most willing party to this conspiracy. Even at this supreme moment of her fortunes, she resolved that if she committed this great treason, it should not, after all, prove so very beneficial to the intrigues of Louis XV. "What do they seek," she exclaimed, "but to prolong our intestine discord, and to make Russia powerless, and France predominant in the affairs of Europe?"

Cardinal Fleury, and his master Louis, would little have liked to see the severe smile which lightened up the face of the Princess, when she was thinking over the part which they so gladly played, and with such lavish expenditure of money, solely to embarrass her dear Russia, to which by so many ties of filial affection, she was entirely devoted.

Meanwhile, during the time that these thoughts and others, some more worthy, some less worthy of a great mistress of state-craft, were occupying her mind, Lestocq went on talking. He reiterated his own fears, his dread of Ostermann and Botta, who could not be cajoled as the Duchess Regent had been ; the impatience of the common soldiery, who were devoted to her cause, and whom he had met with at the café of the Preobrajenski regiment on the preceding evening.

Gradually, during this animated interview, in which, however, Lestocq had taken the principal part, and the answers of the Princess had chiefly been confined to a simple 'Yes' or 'No ;' and indeed to which she had sometimes not deigned to make any answer whatever, he had broken through the usual severe forms of Russian etiquette at Court, and had finally taken his seat at the table at which the Princess Elizabeth was sitting. It chanced that on that table lay a large piece of cardboard. The Princess was an artist herself, as well as a great encourager of art ; and this cardboard was probably put out for some drawing that she was to make. It was, however, destined for a greater purpose than any drawing that any Princess, even one so accomplished as Elizabeth of Russia, could design.

Lestocq, who was an abundant talker, the vainest of men, continued to urge, in various forms of words, the various arguments which have hitherto been stated. At the same time he was very busy with his pencil, for he was an admirable draughtsman. The Princess was somewhat amused with the whole proceeding, especially with Lestocq's audacity in seating himself at the same table with her. If she had been

asked what she thought he was doing, she would most likely have answered that he was caricaturing, for she knew his skill and wit in that dangerous art,—that he was perhaps depicting the scene at the Russian Court of yesterday, and that she was to appear disfigured by her tears after her interview with the Duchess Regent.

The conversation languished, and by way of continuing it, she asked him to show her what he had been drawing. The result rather surprised her. He had made an admirable likeness of herself, clad in the robes of a sovereign of Russia, with a crown upon her head. This drawing occupied one half of one side of the cardboard. On the other, she appeared in the dress of a nun, with a very deplorable countenance, rendered very thin by mortification and fasting, and affording a ludicrous contrast to the genial, jovial face, which her Imperial Highness was wont to show to the common soldiers, whom she allowed to get up behind her sledge, and to accompany her through the streets of St. Petersburg, such favoured individuals being considered by common consent, and without much reproach, to be her favoured lovers.

On the other side of the cardboard were depicted Lestocq himself, and other accomplices, enduring the torments of the rack.

It was surprising to see the effect which these drawings produced upon the Princess Elizabeth. She looked at the cardboard fixedly. She turned it over and over again several times, regarding, with stern contemplation, its rude portraitures, which were not without considerable pictorial merit. Never did any work of any artist, not of a Michael Angelo, a Titian or a Murillo, have

such direct effect upon the destinies of the world.

The Princess whispered a few words to Lestocq; but they appeared to be most decisive words, for an expression of gladness pervaded his countenance, and he quitted the room hastily and abruptly.

Three minutes had not elapsed before the Princess summoned her attendants, and desired that instant search should be made for Lestocq, and that he should be recalled to her presence. But no one could find him. He had left the palace: no one could tell whither he had gone. And thus that final moment of indecision, for indecision it doubtless was, had no effect; and the Princess was irretrievably bound to whatever course she had decided to take, in the few brief whispers (for conspirators speak in whispers even when they are in their secret chambers and fear no spies,) which she had exchanged with Lestocq, after a full and earnest contemplation of those rude drawings which appeared to have excelled in eloquence all speech.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER X.

OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION—IVAN'S PART IN IT—
AZRA'S CARE FOR IVAN.

IF the Princess Elizabeth had devoted friends, the Duchess Regent was not friendless. Before Lestocq had quitted the Princess's Palace, Ivan de Biron was endeavouring to make his way into the Duchess Regent's Palace, to warn Her Highness of the coming danger. And he succeeded in doing so.

It would have been no easy matter for a young man in Ivan's position to obtain an audience with this great lady; but revolutions, however severely carried out, generally leave some servitors who, from the length of their service, their fitness for it, and their merely official character, still retain their offices.

Ivan lingered about the gates of the palace, watching his opportunity, until at last he saw an aged groom of the chambers whom he had known in his palmy days. The man was, at first, by no means inclined to renew the acquaintance; but

when Ivan told him that he had been recalled from exile by the orders of the Duchess Regent, and that he wished to have an opportunity of expressing his gratitude, this groom of the chambers thought it as well to be on good terms with a person who had been so favoured, and he consented to take the message with which Ivan sought to entrust him.

This request for an audience was, after some delay, brought to the Grand Duchess. So few had been the instances of recall from exile, that her Highness instantly remembered the fact that Ivan had been so recalled, and at whose intercession this great favour had been granted. Her favourite, Juliana de Mengden, was with her at this moment: indeed they were seldom apart.

"We will not see him ourselves," said the Duchess Regent: "it pains us to hear about these poor exiles, few of whom our Ministers will yet allow us to recall. Biron himself is not so bad as he has been painted; and, perhaps, if we had been wiser, Juliana, we might have kept him as a friend. God knows that there are difficulties enough in governing this people for the wisest and the strongest to master; and the Duke was both a wise and a strong man. You shall see the youth, Juliana, and hear what he has to say."

The favourite obeyed her mistress; and Ivan was ushered into her presence in an adjoining apartment.

Ivan, after briefly expressing his feelings of gratitude to the Duchess Regent, and his consequent devotion to her service, related to Juliana every circumstance which he had learnt regarding the projected conspiracy. The favourite

was much impressed by what she had heard, and quickly returned to her mistress to relate the story, adding sundry comments of her own, as to the danger of remaining perfectly quiescent. Her Highness, however, took little heed of all that she heard. She was not a woman without some sense, but seemed to be lapped in a fatal state of security, and was resolutely blind to all that was happening around her.

This, it must be remembered, was the very day after that in which that scene had occurred between the Duchess Regent and the Princess Elizabeth, when the tears and protestations of the Princess had produced so great an effect.

"My dearest love," said the Duchess, "you are like the rest of them; this is the same story that Ostermann and the Austrian ambassador, and my poor Duke, too, are perpetually dinning into my ears. Spies must be telling something. What else are they paid for? They must invent conspiracies, whether there are any, or not. None of you understand the Princess: none of you, but myself. As long, my dear, as she has her lovers to pay court to her, little she cares for anything else. And she is a good creature. Did you see how she fondled our dear little Ivan? She would not hurt a hair of his head for the world. Go back to the youth: thank him, and tell him that we will try to find a place for him in our household. We have heard much good of him, of his kindness formerly to those whom the Duke, his master, banished. And come back soon. I do not think the pearls should be sewed on to the robe, but should hang in tassels. It will be something new for to-morrow's ball." Thus the demented woman gave her thoughts to the frivolities of dress, at the most critical moment of her life.

Ivan was dismissed by Juliana, but at the same time, was warmly thanked by her for the information he had given. She did not tell him how lightly it had been received; but she added to his feelings of satisfaction, by letting him know the favour which the Duchess intended for him in taking him into her household.

Ivan hastened to find Azra. Each of them was now acquainted with the ways and habits of the other. He knew in what quarter of the city her tribe of gypsies would be likely to be found at any time of the day. Seeing him, she came out of the circle, apparently to go through the accustomed fortune-telling, but in reality to inform him that, if any reliance was to be placed in what she had last heard, the outbreak of the conspiracy was fixed for that night, or the next. Their chief was quite certain of that. They were to be in the streets two hours earlier next morning. There would be crowds in all the public places. She had been at his lodgings to tell him this, but could not find him.

Ivan longed to go back to the Winter Palace with this additional information; but he was too well versed in the ways of princes, to imagine that he could, a second time in the same day, be so fortunate as to obtain an audience, even with the favourite.

He was too much troubled, however, (for, by this time he had come to have implicit confidence in all that Azra told him) to take any rest that night. He kept watch in dark corners near the Winter Palace, and prepared for that action which he now felt certain he would have to take.

That same evening there was a certain kind of ferment at the barracks of the Preobrajenski

regiment. This ferment was almost indescribable. It was as if a hive of bees had been suddenly disturbed by some intruder. In all directions there were small knots of men, who talked together in most earnest tones, and seemed to be preparing for some great enterprise.

It was a remarkable error in the Russian military system, and a most deplorable one, that it was the universal custom for almost all the officers of a regiment to sleep in different quarters from those assigned to the men.

The Preobrajenski regiment, already looked upon and favoured as household troops—in fact a sort of Prætorian Guard—was, this evening, under the command of one subaltern officer, a Scotchman, named Grews. He did not fail to notice the strange kind of excitement which prevailed among the men under his command. It was with some difficulty that, partly by persuasion, partly by command, he at last induced them to go to bed; and it was, with a presentiment of coming evil, that he himself lay down to rest.

At twelve o'clock, however, all was supremely quiet, both in those barracks, and throughout the capital. The Russians of that day, as indeed all the nations of Europe, kept very different hours from those adopted in more modern times. At the hour of midnight there was scarcely a solitary human being to be seen moving through the snow-covered streets of St. Petersburg. Midnight revels were rare in that city.

It was then that the Princess Elizabeth, accompanied only by Lestocq and by her chamberlain Woronzow, rode forth to commence her audacious undertaking. At last that vacillating and irresolute mind had come to a fixed resolve; and, henceforth, there was no alternative but the one

depicted by Lestocq. The choice was between a convent or a throne; or, perhaps, it might more truly be said, between that fair head being surmounted by a crown, or being laid upon a headsmen's block.

Silently these three conspirators moved through the streets. They reached the Preobrajenski barracks, unchallenged. It is probable that they were observed; but, if so, the few passers-by, or the sentinels on guard at the public buildings, considered that it was but a freak of their beloved Princess; and that safety for themselves consisted in their being careful not to observe too much, and not to recognize these daring intruders upon the stillness of night.

The Preobrajenski regiment was thoroughly prepared to receive the foremost personage of the three midnight conspirators. Upon a slight knock being given at the gate of the barracks, it was immediately opened. The thirty men of the regiment, who had long been gained over to the service of the Princess, and who had for some time ardently wished for the coming of this important crisis, rose and welcomed her, with their corporal, Grunstein, at their head. They then summoned the rest of their comrades, numbering about two hundred and seventy, and told them that the Princess Elizabeth had come to speak to them. When they were all assembled, she made a short speech, stating her grievances, declaring her rights, and finally asking them whether they would, one and all, support her in her resolve, to claim then and there her just inheritance, the throne of Russia, and to rule them as it became the daughter of Peter the Great to rule.

There was not a moment's hesitation. Every man in the regiment was ready and willing to offer his allegiance to her.

In their enthusiasm, however, they uttered words which horrified the humane Princess. "We are ready: we will kill them all." *

Never was the comment which Lady Macbeth made, when reading her husband's letter, more applicable than to the Princess.

"What thou would'st highly,
"That would'st thou holily."

And Elizabeth Péetrovna had a more consistent character than that of the faltering Macbeth. She indignantly replied "If you intend to act in that way, I will not go with you;" and those of her contemporaries, or of after-historians who have studied this remarkable woman's nature closely, would have known, and know, that these were not idle words, and that, even at this perilous moment, she would have abandoned the enterprise, recognizing all the danger of such abandonment, if its success were to be attained by any sacrifice of human life.

The soldiers shouted "Let it be as you wish, and as God wishes; but we are ready to sacrifice our lives for you."

The first thing they did, to prove the sincerity of their words, was to seize upon that loyal but unfortunate subaltern officer, the Scotchman Grews.

That done, they followed the Princess, who went straight to the Winter Palace, where the Duchess Regent, the grand Duke of Brunswick her husband, and their infant child, the young Emperor, were lodged.

No difficulty was experienced from the guards who surrounded the palace. Upon hearing what

* *Matiouschka, mouï gotovoui mouï iz vsex oubiem.*

the Princess Elizabeth proposed to do, they instantly acquiesced, as if it had been quite a matter of course, and to be expected according to the ordinary march of events in Russia.

It might have been thought that the Duchess Regent would have gained sufficient experience from her own successful conspiracy, to place but little reliance upon piquets stationed in front of her palace, and of sentinels placed at its doors.

The progress of this conspiracy bore an almost ludicrous similarity to her own; and, like it, went to prove the uselessness of depending upon the fidelity of the Russian soldiery at that period, in such emergencies. A little dog inside the palace walls, would have been more serviceable than all these sentinels and piquets.

A detachment was sent forward, headed by Lestocq and Woronzow, to enter the palace. It was then that Ivan, emerging from his place of concealment, took his part in the proceedings of that night. He had seen the approach of the Princess at the head of her Preobrajenski followers. He had listened to the conference between them and the piquets on guard. He felt that all was lost for the side that he had taken; but, losing all sight of policy, and behaving like the brave and noble youth that he really was, he resolved to peril his life, and willingly to die, if die he must, in the endeavour to give some warning to the Duchess Regent, into whose service he considered he had already entered.

It was a dark night. The conspirators rushed forward, not in any soldier-like order, but like a mob; and Ivan found no difficulty in entering with them. He knew the ways of the palace better than they did; and, though persistently followed by two or three of them, he reached the

Grand Duchess's sleeping apartment a few moments before they did. Not in time, though, to give any warning. He turned and faced the insurgent crowd of soldiery.

In a moment he was cut down by the stroke of a sword on his shoulder ; and, kicking his body aside, for he was in a state of insensibility, the conspirators entered the apartment.

Themselves conspirators, the Duchess Regent and her husband must have felt, when suddenly awakened by this clamour in their room that an evil time had come for them ; and that they were to undergo the same fate as that which, only one year ago, they had caused to fall upon the ex-Regent of Russia, the Duke of Courland. They made no resistance.

The Grand Duke, the Duchess Regent, the infant Emperor Ivan, and the favourite, Juliana de Mengden, were at once seized by the conspirators ; and were conveyed that night in sledges to the palace of the Princess Elizabeth, who herself returned there about three o'clock in the morning. Other arrests were then made of certain persons supposed to be especially devoted to the late dynasty, among whom was Count Ostermann, whose craft did not, on this occasion, suffice to save himself.

Ivan was carried to the Princess Elizabeth's Palace with the Imperial captives, it being supposed that he was a person of some consequence.

During that eventful night, his movements had been sedulously watched, not by any spy, but by the loving Azra.

She had not shown herself to him, being afraid that he would send her back, but she had been more convinced of the peril in which he stood, than even he had been himself. She could not

enter with the insurgent soldiers ; but she watched for their return ; and when Ivan was carried out by some of them, she followed to the Princess Elizabeth's Palace, and there in the tumult of the night she was able to gain an entrance. Ivan was taken into the presence of the Princess ; and what he had done was told her.

The magnanimous Princess, for such she was, at once said " Let the poor youth go. But see, he cannot stand. Is there any one who will take care of him ? "

They told her that his sister was in the hall ; for Azra had said that she was his sister. And the Princess replied " Give him to her, and let him be taken wherever she wishes. But let us hear no more of him, for we will not that any one should suffer for what has been done this night. "

Then, slightly withdrawing, but there were those who heard what she said, she exclaimed, " Will there be any one so true to me, who will be ready to die for my sake, when my time shall come ? "

And then the generals and the statesmen began to throng about her Imperial Majesty, and to tell her that this day was the happiest day of their lives, and the one to which they had long been looking forward. " Was she not the daughter of the greatest Sovereign that Russia had ever known ? the Sovereign, indeed, who had created Russia, and made it the mighty Empire that it had been fated to be. "

On the ensuing morning, the senate and nobles of Russia were invited to attend at the Princess Elizabeth's Palace, and to confirm her accession to the throne.

All the troops then quartered at St. Petersburg, were desired to parade outside the palace.

Neither within, nor without those walls, was the slightest objection taken by any of the persons there assembled, to the claims of the Princess Elizabeth to ascend the throne which her father had so worthily occupied.

One touching incident served to heighten the strangeness of this memorable event. The infant Emperor, delighted with the noise of the soldiers shouting for their new Sovereign, clapped his tiny hands, and did what he could to welcome the new order of things.

"Ah! poor child," exclaimed Elizabeth, now Empress of Russia, perhaps for the moment touched with some feeling of remorse, "you little know what this day's work has done for you."

Thus was completed a revolution which, even in that epoch of revolutions, was remarkable for the recklessness with which it was prepared, and for the completeness with which it was carried into execution.

BOOK IV.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT REVENGE OF THE PRINCESS MARIE ON
THE HOUSE OF BIRON—RECALL OF EXILES FROM
SIBERIA.

MEANWHILE, in Siberia, during the important and singular transactions at the Court of Russia which have been narrated, the gloomy year went round, bringing little or no hope to the exiles. They had no reason to think that the reign of the infant Emperor was likely to be disturbed. They naturally supposed that Münich, the foremost general Russia had produced in that age, a man, too, of much political dexterity, was not likely to allow the Duchess Regent to be deprived of power; and, all of them, without any exception, looked forward to a long continuance of the present dynasty, and did not dare to hope otherwise than that they themselves should live and die in exile.

Strange to say, the Duke of Courland did not find his days of exile pass so miserably now as might have been expected. The daily visits of the Princess Marie were a great solace to him.

These visits were never omitted. The Duke and his visitor had lived in the same circle. The Princess had been accustomed from her earliest years to listen to political discussions, and was well versed in all the principal occurrences at Court that had happened up to the time when her father and his family were banished.

The Duke of Courland was, as may have been already seen from this narrative, a very remarkable man, and had even some touch of genius in him. Indeed the favourites of monarchs mostly are remarkable men—not, necessarily, because monarchs have any particular skill in the choice of men; but because they (the favourites in question) are chosen by one person. The favourites of assemblies, on the other hand, generally gain their power from a large manifestation of second-rate qualities; and whatever genius they have, is as likely to be a hindrance as a help to them. By the word ‘favourites,’ as used above, favourite ministers are chiefly meant, not favourite companions.

It was something new to the Duke, hitherto all-powerful and greatly feared by all who came near him, even by the late Empress herself, to find some one who talked to him without reticence, and with perfect fearlessness, and who did not hesitate to speak openly to him of some of his own doings. He did not know who she was. Hated though he was, and avoided by all his fellow-exiles, with the exception of the Princess, he still might easily have succeeded in discovering her name. She, however, had told him from the first, that if he attempted to make this discovery, he would see no more of her; and this threat proved sufficient to restrain his curiosity.

She became very dear to him. He did not

like to tell himself how dear she had become. Perhaps love is never so potent as when it seizes upon those who have passed their first youth, or even those who have passed the prime of life. The choice made is then likely to be thoroughly suited to the nature of the man; and any intellectual gifts on the part of the woman are likely to be more attractive to a man of this age than to a younger person. Besides, there is a feeling that as life is not likely to be very long, this late love is the last thing to be clung to; and that after it, should it be lost, all will be desolation.

It could not be said, however, that the Duke loved this young woman. Certainly if he did so, it was unconsciously. But he thought her the most attractive person he had ever known. He looked forward to her coming,—counting the hours, even the minutes which preceded it; and he dreaded her departure, inventing numerous excuses to delay it, feeling bitterly the utter loneliness that then fell upon him. The Duke was a man of much fascination of manner, which he then exerted to the uttermost. Not without some effect. The Princess herself began to feel less and less irksome these visits, which she had first made from a sense of duty, or rather, we might say, if we looked narrowly into her motives, from a strange desire for a great and noble revenge—revenge, not only upon the chief enemy of her father and his family, but also upon her lover Ivan, whom she still accused of having basely deceived her by the concealment of his name and lineage.

Such was the state of things in that obscure little town in Siberia, Pelem, where some of the principal personages of our story were at that time residing.

A great change was, however, preparing for them—a change very frequent in Russian history. In fact, during that century, exile to Siberia was merely a Russian mode of “going out of office.” It was a mode practicable only in a country of that extent—in fact a little world of its own; and certainly it was a better system than that adopted in French revolutions, and other like convulsions in other countries, when the going out of office mostly accompanied, or shortly preceded, the loss of life as well as of power. And there are some zealots perhaps, who, living under constitutional governments, and fondly desiring that those who govern should have more power of government, would not be sorry if there were a Siberia attached to their own country to which the chiefs of the defeated party might occasionally be sent, instead of being suffered to remain, and thus to form a powerful and vexatious opposition, able to thwart the policy of their successors in office.

The inhabitants of Pelem were pursuing their daily labours—those labours, which, in their former and happier days, they could hardly have supposed themselves capable of executing—while couriers were speeding from St. Petersburg with orders for their immediate recall. These orders were almost indiscriminate. The Duke of Courland was to be recalled; for, as before stated, he had always kept on good terms during his tenure of power with the Princess Elizabeth. Again, as was natural, the daughter of Peter the Great was anxious to recall the Menschikoffs, and all the friends, favourites and servants of her father, who had been banished during the reign that succeeded his.

Among these exiles were the Prince Serbatoff

and all the Prince's family, including of course, the Princess Maria Andréevna.

It was early in the morning of a dreary day that the Duke of Courland paced up and down his chamber in a most restless manner. Every now and then he went to the window, but returned to resume his weary paces up and down the room, with a most dissatisfied expression of countenance. Though early, it was an hour later than the time when he was usually visited by the Princess Marie. She had never been so late before; and the Duke's mind was filled with the most gloomy apprehensions. He feared that she was ill. Anything else, he said to himself, he could bear but this. There were unaccustomed noises, too; but, as the windows looked only into the courtyard at the rear of the house, nothing could be seen from them which could explain the noise in the streets; and it showed the Duke's absence of mind, or rather his unconscious return to the habits of former days, that he had gone often to the window, as if it had been one in his room at the Summer Palace of St. Petersburg.

He did not venture to show himself on the flat roof of the house which might have enabled him to understand the cause of this delay in the coming of the Princess, and of the noises in the street which became more and more defined.

His anxiety was soon relieved in a very unexpected manner. A courier came to him, announcing the glad tidings of his recall; and almost immediately afterwards a letter was brought to him from the Princess Marie. It was a cold, polite letter. It told him that there was no occasion for her seeing him again. His Highness would have no need now of any services which she could render. Such as she

had rendered, were given to one who was, yesterday, only a poor exile like herself.

The letter was signed by her in full: "The Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff."

The Duke shivered as he read this letter. "So then," he said, "this was the daughter of one of my bitterest enemies; and such was her revenge. And it was all revenge, I fear. Some womanly pity, mayhap; but nothing more." The thought crossed his mind that he would have been contented with a longer exile, had she been there to share it, even though it was but pity that brought her to his side.

Being now a free man, and caring no longer for the aversion or the hatred of his fellow-exiles, he rushed from the house, and inquired for the dwelling of the Serbatoffs. But, to his dismay they had already gone. It was the Princess Marie, who had skilfully contrived that the intelligence of the Duke's recall should not reach him until she and her family had quitted the town. The Duke followed with all speed. A memorable incident occurred in the course of his journey. At a bridge, near Kazan, his sledge was stopped, as another sledge, escorted by soldiers, had arrived on the bridge at the same moment. In it was Count Münnich. Each of the two great rivals and bitter enemies, recognized the countenance of the other. They did not speak; but, lifting their caps, bowed with grave politeness. The Duke pursued his journey to St. Petersburg; while the Count went on to Pelem, to occupy the very house to which he had sent his rival, and the plan of which he had designed with his own hand.

Such were the vicissitudes of fortune which befell Russian statesmen at that period, and long afterwards.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER II.

AZRA'S CARE OF IVAN—HE WRITES TO THE EMPRESS
ELIZABETH—THE RESULT OF THAT LETTER.

THE story now returns to St. Petersburg, the time being that which immediately succeeded the successful enterprise of Elizabeth to place herself upon the throne. For the first few days after that event, the state of affairs at St. Petersburg was such that any bold attempt made by the partisans of the late Duchess Regent, and the late infant Emperor, might have greatly embarrassed the new government. The childhood of the deposed Emperor was much in his favour; and there were statesmen who would have been very glad to avail themselves of his long minority to consolidate their own power, and to promote their own views. The population of St. Petersburg would have looked on with a feeling of comparative indifference, for Elizabeth's popularity rested with the soldiery, and chiefly with those favoured regiments, such as the Preobrajenski, which had all along been devoted to her cause.

No daring attempt, however, was made by the partisans of the Duchess Regent and her family; and the new Empress was at liberty to employ herself in rewarding those who had gained for her the Empire, and in punishing those whose only fault was their fidelity to the late Duchess Regent. Lestocq and Grunstein, and even the common soldiers of the Preobrajenski regiment, were highly favoured and rewarded. The Empress's opponents were condemned to death; but Elizabeth, true to her intention to abolish capital punishment in Russia, commuted all these sentences of death to the lesser condemnation of exile to Siberia.

As was to be expected, Marshal Münnich and Count Ostermann were among those statesmen who were considered to be most dangerous to the new dynasty. They had been immediately arrested. Each of these great men bore his reverse with singular fortitude and even daring. The Count's sentence was not commuted until he had absolutely been brought to the block; and the Marshal, knowing what a farce, for the most part, judicial examinations are, when the judges are taken from a dominant party and the accused are prominent persons of a defeated party, bade them write anything they liked in the nature of articles of accusation, and he would sign them, as, indeed, he did.

The fate of these statesmen does not concern this story so much as the fate of certain minor personages, and especially that of Ivan de Biron. When taken to his miserable lodgings, it need hardly be said that he was there carefully tended by his so-called sister, Azra the gypsy.

It has been remarked by some shrewd observers of human nature that a certain kind

of familiarity (the familiarity, for instance, which must exist in a sick room) endears men to women; but has not a similar effect or, at any rate, not so great an effect upon men with regard to women.

Azra's weary watchings of the wounded man only rendered the poor gypsy girl more fond of him. She had much to endure. During the fever that beset him in the first few days of his illness, he was occasionally delirious; and in his ravings spoke much of his beloved Marie.

The liking of Azra had been sudden, as was to be expected from her ardent Eastern nature; but it had been greatly fostered and increased, most unintentionally on Ivan's part, by his conduct and bearing towards her. A man is seldom more respectful to all women than when he is very much in love with any one. Now Azra, the beauty of her tribe, had not been without many lovers both among her own people and amongst strangers. But their wooing had been of a very rough character, and had always disgusted the refined nature of the girl. On the contrary, Ivan who had always been most respectful to her, treating her as a faithful friend, and somewhat as a brother, had thus greatly added to his attractiveness. She felt that she had never before been respected; and this respectful bearing on his part had a wonderful charm for her.

Ivan's wound had not been of a serious character. The meagre fare and the constant exercise he had taken, for he might be said to have lived in the streets since his return to St. Petersburg, aided his recovery. Azra was not only his chief nurse, but his only doctor.

Like the other women of her tribe, she was familiar with the treatment of wounds; a knowledge gained in the course of the feuds that occasionally arose between the gypsies, the police, the soldiery, and, generally, the lower classes in the great towns of Russia, which feuds sometimes led to very severe encounters.

Azra, would not have trusted to her own skill in caring for this life so precious to her, if she had possessed the means of paying for a doctor. All her little earnings went to provide the payment for the lodgings, which was inexorably demanded week by week, and also for the food and medicaments which were necessary for the patient.

The new reign of the Empress Elizabeth had now lasted three weeks, and had been consolidated without any serious difficulty, when Ivan, now recovered from his wound, became perfectly conscious of his condition and anxious to do something for his livelihood. During the last week he had been fully aware of all that Azra had done for him, and that he had been supported by her precarious earnings. She had never been able to remain a whole day with him; and it was wonderful that she had had the strength and endurance to go through her usual toil, and, at the same time, to minister for several hours in the day, and for a great part of the night, to the many wants of her patient.

A curious scene was now enacted between Ivan and Azra. It was the middle of the day, and Azra had stolen away from her gypsy friends, having secreted a portion of their common meal. The gypsies that morning had not been successful in their labours, and not a single copeck had fallen to Azra's share. Some

sustenance, however, was provided for the pair by the food which Azra had brought with her; but that beverage so dear to all who live in Russia, tea, was not forthcoming. Ivan rummaged in his pockets in that hope, so often proving vain, but still always prevalent among very poor people, that some well-disposed small coin may have secreted itself in an obscure corner, with a view to being joyfully welcomed on some dire occasion.

Azra imitated the movements of Ivan, and explored the capacious pockets which all gypsies, male and female, are wont to carry about with them. After several fruitless expeditions into the recesses of their pockets, the young pair were obliged to confess to one another their utter impecuniosity, which confession they accompanied with an immoderate burst of laughter. Oh! what a happy thing is youth! It can find something to laugh at even in the direst state of misfortune. As Béranger says,

Dans un grenier qu'on est bien à vingt ans.

"Something must be done," exclaimed Ivan, feeling that he must take the lead in the conversation.

"Yes, dear Ivan" (she had for some time indulged herself in calling him "dear Ivan," though he, on rare occasions only, called her "dear Azra").

Ivan was the least vain of young men; but still a thought, not altogether unwelcome, but which was to be resolutely repressed, would darkly intrude itself upon him, that he and this poor girl were becoming a little more intimate than would be desirable for her or for him, and certainly for the Princess Marie,

whose presence he did not feel sure, would have been quite acceptable on these occasions.

"Yes, Ivan, something must be done; but it need not be done by you, dear. I can now leave you for much longer times, and so shall gain more. We gypsies have a saying, 'Light wallet in the morning: heavy wallet at night.' I am sure to be very rich this evening, for Moostan, our chief, said that we should go to the Café Preobrajenski this evening, and all the soldiers there have so much money from the Empress that they don't know what to do with it. That rouble I had the other day came from one of them."

It is a strange thing, but one never understands human nature, that Ivan did not at all like to hear of this rouble given by a soldier; nor did it at all delight him that Azra was to sing and dance at the Preobrajenski Café that night. Yet he was true—as true as men can ever be—to the one object of his devotion, the Princess Marie; and he would have resented it as an insult of the deepest kind if any one had ventured even to inquire why it was that he should have had any dislike to Azra's going to that café, where the soldiers were so generous and so kind, and withal so profuse in their admiration for pretty gypsy girls.

Ivan, with that grand power of self-deception which, perhaps, is the greatest source of our happiness, entirely declined to ask himself any question of that nature.

"I wish you would not go so often to that café, Azra," he exclaimed, somewhat pettishly.

Azra must have been a very innocent girl, for not the faintest notion that anything like jealousy

was beginning to arise in the dim depths of Ivan's soul, entered at all into her mind.

"Oh!" she replied, "we sometimes get five times as much from that café as from anywhere else; and Moostan says—he is such a wise old man, and very good to me—that we should not get nearly so much if we went there too often. But I must go, dear, I can't stay any longer, I was beaten the other day—but I didn't mind it, for being late." And so saying, she seized his pallid hand and kissed it. That did not mean much in that time and amongst that people, for there was a constant kissing of hands on the part of inferiors to superiors. And then she moved quickly out of the room.

Ivan's thoughts, after she left, were very disconsolate. Even before the new Empress's accession to the throne, he had been ill-received by all his former friends and acquaintances whom he had solicited. Few, indeed, were those to whom he could appeal; for, as has been said before, most of his friends and relatives had been sent to Siberia. And now what chance had he, the only man who had really made any effort personally, to avert the successful revolution, of finding support or favour with any human being in St. Petersburg? As he pondered over these thoughts, a most daring project came into his mind. In the confusion that had occurred during that night, when the Princess Elizabeth seized upon the reins of empire, all rank and order had been disturbed. Many persons of the lower ranks, servants and others, had crowded into the hall of Elizabeth's Palace when the Duchess Regent, her husband, the infant Emperor, and the other prisoners had been brought in.

The new Empress had never been accustomed to speak with "bated breath, or whispering humbleness;" and she was not likely to do so when she felt that she was supreme in Russia. She had, moreover, the loud clear voice of her father; and though what she had said on Ivan's being brought wounded into the Hall, was probably not meant by her to be overheard, it was as loudly uttered as a "stage aside;" and twelve or thirteen people, some of them of the lower class, heard every word of it. A version of the Empress's saying, not very accurate, but still not very far from the truth, was current in St. Petersburg. The gypsies, always eager for intelligence, learnt what had been said or was supposed to have been said, by the Empress; and Azra had not failed to repeat it to Ivan, thinking that it would be some comfort to him to hear it.

He said to himself "She and Azra are great souls." He could not help smiling after he had said this to himself, at his daring to liken Azra to the Empress. "But they are alike; for they can both recognize and understand fidelity. I will write to her," meaning the Empress, "and will claim to be admitted into her service."

So he did write; and his letter was such a one as royal or imperial personages seldom receive. He told the Empress, who he was and the story of his life. He confessed that he had known of the conspiracy; and from motives of gratitude had told what he knew to Juliana de Mengden: that he had then done his best to prevent the success of the plot; and had received his wound at the door of the Duchess Regent's sleeping apartment.

He concluded his letter by saying that if the

new Empress would forgive him (not that he regretted what he had done), would receive him into her favour, and give him any employment however humble, he would be true to her for the remainder of his life, and ready to die for her if an occasion required it.

It was a bold, noble letter, very characteristic of the man who had, even when serving the Duke of Courland, ventured at the risk of his life, to provide some solace for the unfortunate exiles to Siberia whom his inexorable master had sent thither with an unsparing hand.

Ivan was not naturally what may be called a very clever man, certainly not a man of any genius. He had learnt, it is true, a great deal as Biron's secretary; but the Duke, a good judge of character, had chosen him not for his ability, but on account of the singular honesty that he perceived in him. And Ivan, with many scruples and with much suffering, had been substantially a true servant to his master; though if the Duke had known that his secretary had ever sought to mitigate the sufferings of the Duke's many victims, it would have fared ill with that dependant. Whether Ivan were, or were not, a man of any great talent, certain it is that he had a great soul, and could carry his life in his hand, as the saying is; and that is what few men have nobleness enough to do. He knew, as he penned this letter, that exile or death might not be an improbable consequence of it; but he dared the utmost extreme that fate could send him.

On the following morning he told Azra that he had written a petition to the new Empress. He did not venture to read it to her, or to tell her its exact purport, for he feared that her loving

anxiety for him would make her perceive all the danger of such a missive, and prevent her from aiding him in getting it conveyed to its destination. The beautiful gypsy girl was well known at the palace, as throughout St. Petersburg, and was not without admirers in those sacred precincts. Very great personages might have failed to get any memorial conveyed directly into the hands of the Empress. Azra was not so powerless; and she succeeded in causing this letter of Ivan's to be brought at once into the hands of the greatest personage in Russia.

The Empress, never unobservant of masculine beauty and never disinclined to notice and to favour any greatness and devotion in a subject, was delighted with Ivan's letter; and read portions of it to her attendant ladies, who, seeing the bent of their mistress's mind, did not fail to encourage her in what they called her noble goodness to an enemy.

The result was that a most favourable answer was sent to Ivan; and, in a short time, he was appointed one of the *Dvoraini*, or Gentlemen of the Chamber, in the Empress's household. She regarded him with particular favour, and would sometimes condescend to jest with him about the wound which had not exactly been received in her service; but which had spoken so potently for him. And Ivan, in the fervour of his new gratitude, would protest that he would die for her. Upon which the mirthful Empress would reply "We shall see: we shall see: and perhaps sooner than you expect, De Biron. Men are very apt to say that they will die for the ladies; but our poor experience has not led us to recognize a large amount of male mortality resulting from these masculine protestations."

There were those about Court, but courtiers are sometimes malicious, who even prognosticated that Ivan would supplant the reigning favourite, so much beloved, as scandal said, though of low origin, by the accomplished and handsome Elizabeth.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER III.

A BALL AT THE WINTER PALACE—THE MEETING BETWEEN IVAN AND THE PRINCESS MARIE—AZRA SINGS, AND THE EMPRESS RECOUNTS THE STORY OF AZRA AND IVAN.

THERE was a grand ball at the Winter Palace. The new Empress was determined that her Court should equal, if not surpass, in splendour the Courts of the preceding reigns. As it has been said before, this splendour might be somewhat of a barbaric kind; but it was splendour. The entertainments provided were certainly somewhat incongruous. For instance, in addition to the regular musicians who constituted the Empress's own band, there were stationed, in different parts of the hall, other musicians, chiefly singers, who were to fill up the interludes of dancing by national songs, these bands being dressed in costume. Azra the gypsy girl was there. Her talent was well known, at any rate by all the lower classes of St. Petersburg,

and she had been chosen to form one of a party who had called themselves the "Minstrels of the Neva."

The other girls who sang in this band were dressed in the old Russian fashion ; but Azra, according to the immutable rules of her tribe, was not allowed to dress otherwise than in their peculiar costume. There had been much difficulty in reconciling the other members of the band to this difference of dress ; but the question was settled by a musical necessity.

There was a certain solo part of a song, which was to be sung at a late period of the evening, and which, with what was called the celebrated "Neva Chorus," was to be the *chef-d'œuvre* executed by the Minstrels of the Neva. Now there was no one who could sing this song so well as Azra, and therefore her presence was considered to be indispensable.

It might have been expected that the Empress Elizabeth would have some unpleasant reminiscences connected with any ball given at the Winter Palace, for it was on a similar occasion that she had exercised all her powers of deceit, and had succeeded in deluding the pliant and placable Grand Duchess into a state of abject security. But, amidst the duties and the splendour of a new and great position, any baseness that may have been used in attaining it, is easily forgotten. Moreover, the character of Elizabeth had rapidly developed under the pressure of Empire. Her mind dwelt not at all upon the past, but was full of social and political aims for the future.

This was the first great entertainment at which she had an opportunity of receiving and

welcoming those exiles from Siberia whom she had recalled.

Here and there, in the crowd, there must have been some courtiers, whose caution or whose happy mediocrity had preserved them intact amidst the frequent perilous changes in the official life of Russia at that period. They would know how various were the causes which had led to the exile of the high personages then present, and would appreciate the difficulty which the Empress would experience in her endeavour to reconcile them, and to show something like equal favour to all.

To create a general feeling of amity was her great object. She saw that the security of her reign depended upon her power of effacing ancient feuds amongst the nobility, and making it to be understood that, for the future, there were to be no parties in Russia, but that it was to be one sovereign with supreme power ruling over a united people. The Empress was fully impressed with the great ideas of her father, to which he had often, no doubt, given utterance in her presence. And one of these main ideas was the internal development and civilization of the Empire.

Among the principal personages present, there were several who had to play strange parts that evening, and play them well; for, under the observant eyes of the Empress, great men had to welcome one another and to shake hands, who had done each other irreparable injuries. Passing, however, from them, we come to those who might be considered the minor actors, but who are, nevertheless, not without interest for us.

The Princess Marie Serbatoff was there. She

had long imagined what she should do, and how she should comport herself, if she were ever to meet her old lover Ivan again. After his departure from Pelem, and while she was aiding and comforting his near relation, the Duke of Courland, she had often pictured to herself the meeting with him. Indeed, during her dreary, toilsome journey from Siberia to St. Petersburg, the thought of this meeting had filled her mind. Her father, observing her thoughtfulness, had frequently asked that question, which, perhaps, has never been truthfully answered since the world began, "What are you thinking of, my dear?" but had not obtained any other than the usual answer, "Nothing."

The same thought was now fully in her mind, though she had not the slightest expectation of seeing Ivan at any Imperial festivity. She deemed that though he had returned from exile and had been pardoned, he would still be in obscurity; and, moreover, it was to be noticed that the Duke of Courland himself was not present on this occasion. The politic Empress probably thought that, great as her power and influence might be in reconciling old enemies, that power and influence were not strong enough to admit of her bringing the Duke at once to Court; for his unwelcome presence would imbitter so many statesmen who had suffered from his cruel decrees. Other Russian statesmen and ministers had, for the most part, injured only a few families. These feuds were in the nature of private baronial wars. But the number the Duke had injured was legion; and, moreover, the misery he had caused was quite recent and fully in the minds of all men. He had, therefore, been stopped on his way to St. Petersburg;

and his escort had received orders to convey him to Jaroslaw, where, for the present, he was to remain.

To return to the Princess Marie. She was a woman of a very original mind and disposition. With all that indignation strongly acting upon her, at what she most unjustly felt for Ivan's treachery, as she called it, in not having told her who he was, her love for him was still supreme—that kind of love which it is only given to the greatest souls to feel—immense, unswerving, unalterable, and possessing and pervading the whole existence of the loving person.

She was convinced that they never could be united. With her knowledge of her father, how could she hope that he would now—now that he was likely to be powerful again—listen for a moment to the proposal of such a marriage; and with her love for her father, how could she make up her mind even to hint at such an alliance, which she felt would be a death blow to him?

How then should she meet Ivan, and in what manner should she treat him? It was in her resolve upon this point, that her originality of character manifested itself. She determined to be cold to him; but it should only be cold as a lover. It should be very warm as a friend. She would thank him for all his kindness to herself—for all the labour on behalf of herself and her family which he had shared. She would not fear to bring up every reminiscence of this kind, while she would studiously avoid any reference to the sweet and loving words which had passed between them. If he ventured to recall such passages, she would treat these

reminiscences as the nonsense often talked between boys and girls, in which there could be no real and abiding meaning. She shuddered as she thought how real it was; and how abiding, at least on her part, it ever would be. And then she smiled, thinking to herself that just thought of how much wiser and older young women are than young men, even when the latter have the apparent superiority of age, as was the case between her and her Ivan.

We have somewhat anticipated the events which happened at this great festival, or rather have indicated the spirit and the manner in which it was to be conducted by the greater personages, and by one of the minor persons.

The guests had all arrived. Punctuality is a virtue known at all Courts, and especially at those which are despotic. The Empress had not yet entered the ball-room. Soon there came a hurrying backwards and forwards of pages and chamberlains dressed in gorgeous costume. Then there was a buzz of expectation: then a respectful silence. The folding-doors were thrown open, and the Empress Elizabeth made her entrance, surrounded and followed by a brilliant suite, amongst whom was her new member of the Household, Ivan de Biron.

The Princess Marie was not long in recognizing her lover, notwithstanding that his dress and appearance were not a little different from that coarsely-clad youth who had so often sat by her side in the forest encircling the town of Pelem.

She felt herself growing pale and cold. We may think beforehand as much as we like of any great scene we have to encounter; but, when

the reality comes, we seldom find that we are quite as well prepared for it, as we thought we were.

The Princess Marie, to a certain extent, recovered from her embarrassment by a droll thought—droll from its comical contrast of circumstances—which crossed her mind. She could not help remembering how certain she used to be at Pelem to find Ivan seated by her side in a few minutes after the clang of the horns had ceased, which were blown by the herdsmen announcing their return with their cattle to the town. The flourish of trumpets which had announced an event of a very different kind, namely, the entrance of the Empress into the ball-room, had naturally brought back this pleasant reminiscence to the mind of the Princess. When in the wood at Pelem, she had often, with the playfulness of a girl, shut her eyes, and wrapt in seeming meditation, pretended not to be aware of Ivan's approach, treating it as a matter of great surprise, when he would reproachfully say to her "You must have known, Marie, that I should have been sure to come, for would I leave you to do all this hard work by yourself?"

She never felt more supremely fond of him than when she recalled, as she did at this moment, many meetings of theirs at the edge of the wood; and she thought, unconsciously imitating his Highness of Courland, "Would that we were all back again, so that I might have my Ivan to myself, and that those happy days, for so they were to me, could be renewed."

As soon as Ivan could quit his post of duty and mingle with the guests, he made his way to the Princess Marie. He had known that she was to

be there, and her presence was no surprise to him.

True to her plan of action, for the Princess was not one to falter in a great resolve, she received him as one receives, after long absence, a dear friend. They shook hands warmly. Even in that act of welcome though, he felt that there was something very different from that which had been always present in their meetings in the Siberian wood, now so dear to him, with all its fond recollections. She was the first to speak.

"I am so glad to see you, Ivan. I little thought to see you here, and to find you in high favour, and to what great office does this grand dress belong?"

"I am one of the minor members of the Household, Princess."

"Somewhat different," she, smiling, said, touching the gold lace upon his shoulder, "from the bear and wolf furs of our hard-working days in Siberia."

"But you, Princess, are more yourself than ever, now that you appear as becomes your rank, and not in the martens' fur, which I—"

"Yes, yes; we must not dwell too much upon those former times, Ivan. We now belong to a Court. We must forget the days of Cinderella. You know the old fairy story? How handsome the Empress looks! How proud you must be, Ivan, to serve such a mistress. I doubt not you are in high favour. They do say she likes to have good-looking youths about her."

Ivan felt his heart sink, for he fully understood the meaning of these playful words, and how the Princess sought by ordinary talk of this kind, to keep him at a distance, and to mark the change

which had taken place in their respective positions. What was meant by the word 'youths' was not lost upon him. Oh yes: it was all to be made out to be mere boy-and-girl play—entirely juvenile! He was right in his conjecture.

"But Marie, dearest Marie, have you quite forgotten—"

"Forgotten, no: I am blest with my father's power of memory. I remember everything, even to the foolish sayings of a boy and girl in distant regions. But certainly it is wise, if not pleasant, Ivan, to forget sometimes: and we will not tax our memory too much in recalling what a boy and girl may have said to one another—in their days of childhood, shall we call it?"

"Bid me forget anything but that, Princess."

She laid her hand timidly, but yet affectionately, upon his arm; and said with a voice that trembled as she spoke, "But we will always be friends, the dearest of friends, Ivan. My father is in favour again. See, the Empress is now speaking to him. Can we do anything for you? I am sure my father—"

Ivan, with all his gentleness, was a proud man, and he felt hurt and humiliated to the very uttermost.

"Your father can do nothing, Princess," he haughtily replied.

"I should have been glad," he added, "to have had the honour of dancing with the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff; but shall not presume upon our old acquaintanceship in Siberia; and no doubt there are others in the room more fitting to aspire to her hand in the dance than a mere servitor in the Palace. I see that the Empress is moving onwards, and I had

better follow, as my duty is, in Her Majesty's suite."

So saying, and with a profound bow, Ivan parted from the Princess, carrying with him as sorrow-stricken a heart as was perhaps to be found in that great assemblage, where there were many hearts not at all attuned to the festivity of the proceedings.

Meanwhile, there was one person in the ball-room who had not been an indifferent spectator to this meeting between the two lovers: who, indeed, had marked every change of look and gesture that had passed between them. This was the gypsy girl, Azra. It happened that the band of singers to which she belonged, had been placed close to the very spot in which the two lovers had met; and, coming slightly forward from her circle, Azra had been enabled to watch the lovers closely. Ivan had not seen her; and, until it had come to her turn to sing, he had been oblivious of her presence.

When, late in the evening, she did sing, all eyes were attracted to her. Nature had gifted her with greater powers of song than those possessed by any other person then present. The great singers of the opera at St. Petersburg did not deign to enter these groups, as it would have been quite beneath their dignity to sing the National songs which were in vogue on that occasion.

The Empress herself, a fine judge of musical talent, returned with all her suite to that part of the room where Azra was singing, and listened with pleased attention.

It is not a fancy of courtiers, but is a decided fact, that the members of Imperial and Royal families have a wonderful power of remembering

people. It is part of their kingly craft, and one which they almost always succeed in fulfilling. The Empress had not heard three bars of the song, before she at once recognized the singer; and, after the song had ended, she recounted to the circle of courtiers that surrounded her, the story of Ivan's having been wounded, and of this gypsy girl having come forward and claimed, as a sister, to take care of the wounded man.

The Princess Marie had, on Ivan's quitting her, made her way to her father, sure to be found not far from his imperial mistress; and Marie had listened attentively to the clear tones of the Empress, while she narrated this interesting story of sisterly affection.

Elizabeth, with that sense of humour, which nothing could restrain, called Ivan towards her, and said "You see, my Lords, that for once we have promoted a gypsy to a place in our Household. We should not have discovered, from his looks, his birth and parentage; and we did rather think that he was more closely allied to the puissant House of Courland than to the gypsy tribe, of which that girl is such an ornament. But, my good Ivan," addressing herself to him, "there is no occasion for blushing so vividly. You may well be proud of your sister. Be good enough to convey to her, with this jewel, (and here she carelessly tore a ruby pendant from her dress) our acknowledgment of the pleasure she has given us."

Ivan went to Azra and conveyed the Empress's message. Shyly he then drew back, amidst the smiles of the surrounding courtiers.

There were many persons who did not return in a joyous frame of mind from that ball that night. Amongst them might be counted the discomfited

lover Ivan, the gypsy Azra, and the Princess Marie, who, to her other sufferings, had now the added pangs of an apparently well-founded jealousy.

“His sister, indeed! It is a sister that I never heard of before.”

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER IV.

THE HOPES AND PROJECTS OF THE PRINCESS MARIE—
AZRA AND IVAN DESCRIBED—AZRA'S INTERVIEW
WITH THE PRINCESS.

It is not a new thing to say, that a great struggle in any one human heart, could one pourtray it adequately, would be far more interesting than any description of battles, sieges and revolutions, great and important as their results might be.

There were certainly three persons who left the Winter Palace, after that night of festivity, in anything but a happy mood. Their feelings, however, were very different.

Ivan was shocked and depressed. He could not realize to himself that the Princess could be in earnest in repelling him, and that she could so completely have forgotten, or resolved to ignore, her former promises. He knew her waywardness, and attributed her conduct to any cause but that of falseness to her lover. His course was clear before him. He would

seek for some opportunity of ascertaining what her feelings towards him really were; and he found comfort in thinking, that it was in accordance with her proud and undemonstrative nature, not to manifest in public any signs of great joy on seeing him for the first time again. Still her words had been very significant, and when he recalled them, hope almost fled from his heart.

Azra's feelings were undisturbed by perplexity. They were, nevertheless, very bitter. She had not failed to notice the cold and distant manner in which the Princess had received her Ivan; but she had now no doubt whatever how sincere was his attachment, and she was not comforted by perceiving how worthy of his love, at any rate in outward appearance, was the object of that love.

With the Princess, the state of feeling was very different. Her mind was the prey of contending impulses. She was not going to marry Ivan. That was a decided conclusion. Why then was she made miserable by the recollection of the Empress's story?

"So then, it was that singing girl, who had claimed to have the wounded Ivan given to her care—a righteous claim—a proper claim! Oh, no doubt, a sister's!" This was the bitter soliloquy of the Princess. It was in vain that she repeated to herself the fatal objections to her union with Ivan—the difference of rank—the family feuds not healed, only the outward manifestation of them subdued—the especial enmity her father bore to all the House of Biron. The Duke of Courland was as hateful as ever to those whom, in the days of his supremacy, he had wronged

and persecuted. Her father, the Princess said to herself again and again, would die rather than consent to her marriage with any one of that hated family, even if he were rich and powerful and not merely an obscure member of the Imperial Household.

Still, again and again, these wise reflections were interrupted and controlled by the one thought of that gypsy girl having assumed to herself the care of Ivan during his illness. "How had she become known to him? How, if not known and well-known, if indeed they were not old friends, or something dearer than that, had Ivan endured this familiarity?"

On the day after the Court ball, Azra had, on some pretext, gone to Ivan's lodgings, and had seen him. He was kind and courteous as ever. His expressions of gratitude were warmer than ever; but the fond girl could not help observing that he was not particularly anxious to protract her stay with him.

Another day had passed; and the Princess was still wearily reiterating the thoughts which had never been absent from her mind since her return from the Palace, when it was announced to her that a young woman wished to speak to her. She asked her attendant if she knew who it was. To which there came the reply that Stepan, the page, said he was sure it was the young gypsy girl who sings so well in the streets. "Admit her instantly," exclaimed the Princess; and Azra entered.

For a minute or two the young women looked at each other in silence. Each felt with some pain how beautiful the other

was, and yet, they could not but admire each other. This was not their first time of looking earnestly at one another; but it so happened that they were both of that rare order of beauty which shows its best in simple costume. It had been the pride of Azra's tribe to bedizen her with tawdry ornaments on any occasion of her singing in public, which ornaments, reluctantly worn by the girl, had been in ludicrously bad taste.

And as for the Princess, her somewhat severe and yet singular beauty of feature and of expression, had perhaps never been so becomingly adorned as when she wore the simple dress of a Siberian peasant, and had enchanted the heart of Ivan.

The contrast in the demeanour of the two young women was very great. All that Azra had prepared to say, had gone out of her mind; and she looked the very picture of embarrassment, as she plucked nervously at the tassels of her Kaftan. The Princess, from her earliest years, had lived with great people, and had acquired the best manners of a Court. She was, if one might use the expression, a girl of the world. She, therefore, was perfectly self-possessed.

"What is it that you want with me?" she said, "I do not even know your name?"

"Azra, Madam."

"And what is it you want?"

"Nothing for myself, Madam; but Ivan is so miserable. I am sure if you knew—"

The Princess's look of astonishment stopped Azra in the middle of her sentence.

"And who is your Ivan?—and in what way can I be of any service to you or to him?"

“Ivan de Biron, Madam. The same who was with you in Siberia; but perhaps your Excellency did not know him by that name?”

“I do remember him. He was with us in Siberia, and very kind and serviceable he was to all our household. We are all most grateful; and I am sure my father would do anything to serve him. Is he in distress? I should not think so, if I might judge from his appearance, when I last saw him.”

These answers of the Princess roused the indignation of the faithful Azra, and at once deprived her of either fear, or shame, in regard to what she meant to say.

“No: he is not in distress, except what your ingratitude and unkindness have brought upon him. You know him well, Princess, and you know he loves you; and I know that when he was in the fever, your name was always on his lips; and it did seem as if it had a right to be there. I came to speak up for him, and I am his only friend in St. Petersburg, except the Empress who has been so good to him.”

The Princess only smiled at the vehemence of Azra; but she resolved to ascertain the relations between Azra and Ivan: so she said,

“And pray, if I may make the inquiry, how long have you been acquainted with this young man? And how is it that he was entrusted to your care? I think you informed the Empress that he was your brother?”

Then Azra told her tale: how, at first, from mere good-nature, pitying his forlorn condition, she had given him information which might restore him to fortune—what use he made of this knowledge—how he had been wounded—what

the Empress had said; and, in short, all that had happened, as far as she knew, to Ivan since his return to St. Petersburg.

The only reply of the Princess was "And what has the pity become? Do you love him?"

Azra was not prepared for this direct question. She hung down her head, looked abashed, and felt that, even through her dark colour, the deepest of blushes was visible in her face. But the nimble wit of the gypsy girl did not for long desert her. She raised her head; and, looking full at the Princess, said, with a gentle voice, "And you, Madam?"

It was now the Princess's turn to feel embarrassed, but her more worldly self-command prevented her from betraying her feelings as openly as Azra had done. She, also, with some gentleness, replied. "You saw us, Azra, at the ball. I doubt not that you marked us well. I leave it to your insight, versed as you tell me you and your tribe are in unravelling State secrets and those of the witlings who believe in you, to say, with what feelings, I received your Ivan. And the youth is very dear to me—dear as the best of true friends, and as the kindest help-mate in our trouble. I never had a brother, but—"

It was fortunate for the Princess (for Azra would not have been satisfied with this dubious, though skilful reply) that the Prince, her father, entered the room at this juncture. She lost not a moment in explaining to her father who Azra was. "The singer, dear father, whom you so much admired the other evening. You are wont to be satisfied with your Marie's singing; but I could learn much from her."

"Well, my dear," said the Prince, "I must confess I like to listen to you better than to

any other human being, whether you speak or sing; but perhaps you might improve to other ears by practising with this young woman. You would improve her, too."

The Prince was a kind-hearted gentleman; and, now that he had returned to his proper element, the Court, he was in high good humour. Neither was he insensible to the remarkable loveliness of the gypsy girl, and was pleased to patronize her.

"And this, dear Marie, is the same young woman who was so kind to that friend of ours in Siberia, so at least we heard from our gracious sovereign. That young man will rise at Court, my dear, I can plainly see that. It's a pity he has that hateful name. Is he a relative? I dare say it's a common name in Courland. There must be many people there with the same name as its low-born Duke."

The Princess made no reply to her father's question.

Meanwhile the good gentleman fumbled in his pockets, and produced some gold coins, which, with an affectation of secrecy he placed in Azra's hands; and then, mentioning to his daughter that she was to accompany him in a formal visit that he was to pay to the Empress in the course of that afternoon, he bowed respectfully to both the young women, and saying that he should hope to be allowed sometimes to assist at their singing lessons, the veteran courtier retired.

The Princess and Azra, when left alone, looked at one another, and then burst into an immoderate fit of laughter. There was no part of the remarkable character of the Princess which was more predominant than her sense of the ridiculous. Her love of wit and humour had

often cheered and encouraged Ivan, who had but little of it in his own somewhat stern and steadfast character, when they were employed together in household duties in Siberia.

It pleased and amused the fancy of the Princess, that her father should have supposed the two girls to have been brought together, notwithstanding their difference in rank, by the attraction of musical skill and knowledge, when, in fact, it had been to both of them one of the most dread moments of their lives: a crisis alike to the Princess and the gypsy girl; for Azra felt that the Princess had not succeeded in concealing from her that she, too, devotedly loved her Ivan.

After the laughter had subsided, the Princess was the first to take a decided step. She moved forwards to Azra; and kissed her first on one cheek and then on the other, as was the Russian fashion.

Upon this Azra knelt and kissed her hand, saying, "My little mother, how good of you, for you know I am only a gypsy girl, and I ought not to have come to you; but it was for his sake."

The Princess, fearing any further questioning, said "But now Azra you must go, for I must get ready to accompany my father;" and, so saying, she led her to the door, and kissing her again, dismissed her.

Her last words were "But we will see one another again. They shall have orders always to admit you."

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER V.

IVAN'S AMBITION—MAINTAINS HIS INTIMACY WITH
AZRA—WHO LEARNS TO WRITE.

If there are superior beings, and perhaps there are, who, unseen, regard us and our doings, what must they think when looking over some vast library? What would they say to one another? It might be something of this kind: "Consider the subjects of their books. Look at the hundreds of thousands about religion, money, or love—not about the essential aspects of religion, but treating of mysteries which their poor understandings are utterly unable to comprehend. For the rest, there are a good many of these tomes which tell of their foolish quarrels, and there is a sprinkling, not equal in weight to the dust on the other volumes, of works treating of those things which it most concerns them to know; for they cannot build a dwelling fit even for such poor creatures to live in. In cities, they are not as skilful as the insects which are given them as examples; and they do but

waste those materials which are given for their solace."

Without caring to answer what might thus be said, touching the numberless volumes devoted to religion, money, or war, we might make some defence for the numerous volumes devoted to love. It is not only from its infinite interest, but from its infinite variety, that this subject has justly demanded so many volumes to be devoted to itself.

Probably there is no instance in which any two lovers have made love exactly in the same way as any two other lovers, since the world began.

To the bystander, too, there is this especial interest in the matter, that it is the beginning of a career of comparative unselfishness. It is when in love that a human being, perhaps for the first time in life, finds that another human being is dearer to him or to her, than his or her own self.

Hence we leave, without regret, for the moment, the thorny paths of Russian history, to pursue the bye-ways of private life, as shown in the loves of the Princess Marie, Azra, and Ivan.

After quitting the ball, it had been Ivan's settled resolve to demand some fuller explanation from the Princess Marie of her conduct towards him; and he had said to himself that he would do so the next day.

But he did not do so the next day, neither had he done so at the time when this chapter takes up the story. He had, at first, comforted himself, as has been stated, by the reflection that the Princess was a proud girl, and would be anxious not to show, on their first meeting at the Court of Russia, in the presence of so many

curious eyes, what her real feelings were. Further thought almost proved to him that such coldness, as she had shown, could not be attributed to this cause. There was the marked intention of receiving him as one who had been a kind and obliging friend, while entirely ignoring the existence of any other feeling than that of friendship towards him. He would not go near her now. He would distinguish himself in some way. He would find, or make, a new career; but it should not be as a mere servitor of the Palace, that he would approach her. While he was in that condition, he would keep himself far away from her presence. When she came to Court, as come she would, he would not cease from the closest attendance upon his Imperial Mistress, and would never deviate into the crowd.

By what means should he distinguish himself from the common herd? His early training and his later experience had made him think that the surest mode of rising to power and influence in Russia would be to gain political knowledge of all kinds—to find out, and to be able to tell the new Empress, what were the feelings of the populace towards her—to discover, on their first existence, conspiracies, if any such should be formed,—and, in fact, to make himself a trusted supporter of the new order of things, rather than a mere appendage to the imperial household.

With this view, what was more necessary, what could be more useful, than to maintain his present relations with Azra? It had always been known to the Duke of Courland, and therefore to his private Secretary, how much information that might be useful to the government, was possessed by these wandering tribes of

gypsies. It was not without intention, though hardly confessed to himself, that the Duke, on that eventful evening which preceded the last day of his regency, had condescended to have his fortune told, for the chance of hearing something which, to his apprehensive mind, might convey political intelligence.

Moreover, Ivan had recently learnt to appreciate the gypsy knowledge of coming events, (not altogether of a prophetic character,) from the information which Azra had, from day to day, given him during the last few weeks of the Duchess Regent's tenure of power.

Thus Ivan reasoned with himself, not telling himself, however confidentially, that dearer, perhaps, than the hope of getting any political information, was the longing to retain the sympathy of Azra in the great trouble that beset him. Then, too, it naturally followed that it was very desirable, as he said to himself, that Azra should be taught to write, in order that information might be promptly conveyed to him, when he could not receive it in person.

Thus there was scarcely a day in which Azra did not come to see her friend; and, as he might now be called, her instructor. She had never told him that she had been to see the Princess Marie. This concealment was founded upon no motive of self-seeking, or of jealousy; but she feared, in his present state of feeling towards the Princess, to tell him what she had done; and she also feared that, in his anger at what he would conceive to have been a step derogatory to him, even though he had not prompted it, she would be dismissed for her interference, and would not be allowed to see him again. Poor child, for almost "child" she was, except for the

grown-up gypsy cunning which had been impressed upon her by the elders of her tribe, she had made up her mind, or rather we may say her heart, to devote herself to the reconciliation of the lovers.

The first barrier had for some time been broken down which had prevented Ivan, according to the natural reticence of a lover, from talking to another person of his love. It was now a subject which far more frequently occupied the talk of Ivan with Azra, than did the rumours of latent conspiracies, or the pressing cares of tuition.

Previously to the commencement of a conversation about to be narrated, between Ivan and the gypsy girl, she had received a short lesson in writing. Ivan, absorbed as he was in the profound love he felt for the Princess Marie,—feeling, as regards all other women, (so, at least, he always told himself) that they were but mere images, or at best, pale reflections of her,—still could not help noticing how very graceful Azra was, even when engaged in this ungainly task of learning to write. He thought of his young sisters far away in Courland, whom he loved very much. He had seen them taught to write and to draw, and remembered how he had joked with them about their awkward gestures, and their mode of sitting at the table, while they were being taught. There was that flexible grace about whatever Azra did, which absolutely forbade her being awkward on any occasion.

Ivan, indeed, was wont to say to himself that Azra was as graceful as a fish—an odd simile; but one, the general idea of which had often occurred to him during those listless, unhappy hours

of exile, when he would stand upon one of the bridges of the Tavda, and, in its clear waters, follow the movements of those creatures, which are perhaps the most graceful in the world, though their grace has, hitherto, been scarcely recognized, even by poets.

At a pause in the lesson, Azra had mentioned the name of the Princess Marie, saying how she had seen her, with her father, going to a great party, and how sad she looked.

"I tell you, Azra, she behaved cruelly, wickedly, worse than wickedly, ungratefully, to me."

"Perhaps, my little father, you do not quite understand the ways of women."

"Oh yes; when people behave very wickedly, one always hears that one does not understand them. If one were to be half-devoured by wolves, and were to make any objection to the proceeding, I suppose it would be said by other wolves, that one did not understand the kind intentions of their brethren. Now, do not make these foolish excuses, Azra. You women cling together, and always justify one another."

"I did not know that it was so. It isn't so in our tribe. Machetta is always saying unkind things of me, and follows me about like a watchdog; and I don't love her, I can tell you."

"Perhaps," said Ivan, not caring to answer Azra's remark, "that pompous fool, her princely father, has something to do with it. He thinks he is going to be a great man again at Court. He was glad enough to have me as a serf, when we were in Siberia—and, for the matter of that, I was glad enough to be that serf. But that's all over now."

It may be remembered that the Prince,

a most courteous gentleman, had been very gracious to Azra, when he found her in his daughter's apartment; so Azra, with her honest nature, could not but speak in his favour.

"He is a very good and kind man, Ivan, and would not harm anybody."

"How should you know anything about him, Azra?"

Azra felt her blood mount to her face, perceiving how near she had been to betraying the fact of her visit to the Princess; but Ivan did not notice her confusion, as she replied:

"Oh we gypsies know something about most of your great men; and he never gives less than three roubles when we sing before his palace."

"When he orders, as I have no doubt he has ordered, that I shall not be admitted there," replied Ivan, "I might suppose that it was ungrateful on his part; but it would, of course, only be that I do not understand his peculiar princely mode of expressing gratitude. And his daughter is—a worthy daughter of such a father."

While the conversation had thus proceeded, Azra had risen from her chair, and was, almost unconsciously, practising the first steps of that most exquisite of dances, the Spanish bolero, as frequently and as well danced in Russia, at that period, as in Spain.

She ceased to dance. Advancing towards Ivan, she held up her finger in the impressive manner that she had copied from the elder women of her tribe, and thus addressed him. "Listen, my little father, to a story which I will tell you—a true story, which our good chief often tells us, when we sit round the fire at night, out in the woods. We are not always

here, you know : we like the woods near Moscow better, where the sun is warm sometimes.

"There was once a gypsy, not of our tribe—a bad man—oh so bad, so very bad. He never did what the chief told him to do, and when he got anything, he kept it to himself, and would not share it with others, and was not hungry when they were hungry, and laughed when they were sad, and made friends with the Starosts of the villages, and told wicked lies about his tribe to them, and they gave him as much vodki as he could drink. And this bad man, one day, found a large bag of gold in a hole at the root of a great tree—oh, so large, so large, that he could hardly carry the bag ; but he stole away with it into Moscow and dressed himself as a great Lord, and bought serfs, and lived in a house with windows to it.

"But he was very miserable. You should hear our chief tell how miserable he was. And the disease of the rich man came upon him, and he could not sleep in his palace at nights, and he was too proud, now that he was a great lord, to come out into the big forest and sleep like a good gypsy. And he died of the rich man's disease, and the gypsies would not bury him with the sacred songs, for he was a very bad gypsy."

Ivan could not help smiling, as he did not fail to perceive what was the moral of this story, as told by the lips of a gypsy chief—signifying what evil must come to a gypsy who did not share his good luck with his fellows.

He merely said "It is a very pretty story, Azra, and doubtless quite true ; but I do not see why you tell it me now, or what particular comfort it should give me."

"Ah, you would not wait," she said. "You are too impatient. Listen, listen," she said again, holding up her finger, in the same impressive manner which she had used before. "This is what our chief always says, after he has told us this story. 'My children these great gifts are from the Bad Spirit; and the promises which his red gold holds out, are as false as the first words of a young girl when her lover, whom she loves, asks her whether she loves him.'

"And then all our young men laugh, and they sing in chorus:

They say not what they mean, and they mean not what
they say,
For when they say "No," it does not mean nay,
And when they say "Go," it means you must stay.

Ivan laughed heartily, but was not much consoled by this gypsy refrain, thinking that there was but little resemblance between the nature and the ways of gypsy girls, and those of the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS MARIE STUDIES MUSIC WITH AZRA—THE
DESIGN OF THE PRINCESS FOR THE GOOD OF IVAN.

MEANWHILE, the Princess Marie seemed to have abandoned all thoughts of love, and to be solely devoting herself to the cultivation of music. The first master in St. Petersburg, Herr Schmälder, was in constant attendance upon her; and she contrived that Azra should frequently be present when his lessons were given. Occasionally, too, it was found to be desirable that Azra should take a part; and the Princess listened with delight, when the master dwelt with pleasure upon the rich and wonderful voice of Azra, which, as he said, with the honesty belonging to great artists, only wanted the cultivation which the Princess possessed, to become superior to hers, and, indeed, to be one of the most notable in Europe.

The Princess must have made a great conquest of Azra's affections; for she succeeded in persuading her to adopt another kind of costume

than that which gypsies held to be something sacred to them. A change of dress was always kept at the Serbatoff Palace; and Azra appeared at these lessons as a young friend of the Princess's.

The Prince himself was, also, often present, and welcomed Azra as if she had been one of the family. Not unskilled in diplomatic craft, he was but a poor observer of all that went on in his own household. Otherwise, if he had cared to study the characters of those who were not official or diplomatic persons, he would have been greatly amused and interested by the singular contrast which these two young women presented. Azra's character was one of the simplest that can be imagined. She was an adept in gypsy arts: she knew how to ferret out that information which was so useful to her tribe; but she herself remained a creature of utter simplicity.

The same phenomenon may be observed throughout mankind. There are even statesmen, and what are called men of the world, who never lose this original and almost indestructible quality of mind—simplicity. The world is not slow to appreciate the fact; and, in estimating the characters of those who come most before it, is wont to bestow much favour upon those notable persons who possess this enviable simplicity, and its almost invariable accompaniment, singleness of purpose.

The Princess Marie, on the contrary, was a person of great complexity of nature, much given to introspection, and to diversity of plan and purpose. What was at present uppermost in her thoughts, was to do something which should be very grand and noble, to make an

immense self-sacrifice, and thus, at the cost of her own happiness, to ensure the welfare of the man whom she tenderly and truly loved.

Having this in view, she resolved that Azra should be made a worthy wife for Ivan. She had noticed when Azra sang the solo at the ball given at the Winter Palace, what great musical powers the girl possessed, and what effect had been produced upon that critical audience.

This was a sufficient basis for the Princess to construct her plan upon. Azra was to become a great singer; and, by cultivation of various kinds, was to be made in every respect worthy of Ivan's love. That love was to be transferred from the Princess to the gypsy girl. This, of course, was an easy part of the project in the mind of the scheming Princess.

So subtly are we formed, that minor parts of our character often make, or mar, our greatest resolves. The Princess was exceedingly fond of management. Even during her earliest years, the serfs on her father's estate had found out, with that knowledge of the character of their superiors which serfdom or slavery always brings, that to ensure a compliance with any petition they might make to the Prince, it was very requisite to gain the concurrence of the little Princess, Marie Andréevna. That gained, there was almost a certainty of success. Her sojourn in Siberia, when she had been the chief stay and support of the household, had not weakened her power, or made her less fond of laying down plans for managing other people. Over Ivan she had ruled imperiously. Not that he was otherwise than a person of very strong and decided character; but men in love are apt to be very malleable; and Ivan often smiled to himself as

he perceived how dexterously the Princess endeavoured to manage him, and how skilfully he contrived that she should have her way. Perhaps she would have been fonder of him, but this he little thought, if he had shown more plainly the real sternness and resoluteness of his nature.

One of the many lessons of music at which Azra was allowed to assist, had concluded. Herr Schmälder, during this lesson, had been especially loud in praise of the quality of voice which the Princess's "little friend" possessed. He had said "what a happy man he should be, if any of his daughters had such a voice, and were capable of being taught how to use it."

It has always been a question whether the enjoyment of an art is increased, or lessened, by much knowledge of it—whether, for instance, the comparatively ignorant bystander, if his soul be musical, may not have a keener, if not a more profound, enjoyment even of a masterpiece of music than any of those who can, with adequate skill, bring it into life-like execution. However this nice question may be determined for the generality of persons, it certainly would have been difficult to find any human being who was more transported by music than this gypsy girl, whose knowledge, as yet, of music, was of the rudest kind.

But music, for her, transfigured all she saw. While listening to such an artist as the Princess, Azra was carried away, as it were, into regions of thought and feeling, which, at other times, were very remote indeed from her. Like most uncultivated people, both her thoughts and her talk were confined to subjects of which she had practical knowledge—to those things which she had seen and heard, and to simple deductions

from the humblest experiences. It was rarely that she deviated into any remark of a general or abstract nature.

When speaking, however, of music, she became not only eloquent, but imaginative, and, we may almost say, prophetic.

She would tell the Princess, who listened to her with astonishment, that music was in its infancy. "A time will come, dear Princess, when it will conquer all the nasty bad things in the world. There will be no knout, no cutting off of heads. You will all love even us poor gypsies; and the good Heaven, our dear old chief tells us of, will be on earth for us, for you, for everybody. Oh yes, it will. I can foresee it."

The Princess, smiling, would ask whether this fortunate "everybody" would be sure to love the every other right body who could respond to its love?

"Yes, yes," Azra would reply, with a sigh. "It would be all right then. No. I do not know. No it won't. All people will love you, Princess, because you sing so beautifully."

"Then, my dear Azra, there will still be some unhappy people in the world, for I cannot love everybody in return, you know."

Then the two girls would laugh, and Azra would come down from her poetic flights, and talk in her usual childish fashion, of the most trifling things that she had seen or heard that day.

Returning to what took place after the music lesson which had just been concluded, Herr Schmülder had scarcely left the room, when the Princess began to talk with Azra in a strain of unusual earnestness.

"My dear Azra," she said, "you hear what

Schmälder says. It is too absurd that you should not make use of a gift which God has given you so liberally."

"I do, I do," replied Azra, "I am only afraid that Lenchen and Machetta will hate me more than they do, because our chief will make me sing at the feasts of you great people."

"But the world, the whole world, my dear Azra, might be made to listen to you. The Prima Donna of St. Petersburg is nothing compared to you, if you did but know how to manage that sweet voice of yours. You hear, I say, what Schmälder says, and he is no flatterer: he does not pretend that I am your equal, only that I know better what to do with my inferior voice."

"Oh, it is beautiful," exclaimed Azra. "I feel as if I were not in this world when you sing, dearest Princess."

The Princess looked full in Azra's face. If there was anything in this world she detested, it was flattery; but she saw that Azra's words were from the heart, and she smiled to herself as she thought how disproportionate an effect her mere skill in singing could produce upon this comparatively untutored child. She thought, too, with somewhat of vanity, how both these "children" (so she was pleased to name them in her thoughts,) Azra and Ivan were in her hands, and how she could mould them, exactly as she pleased, to suit her own purposes.

"Ivan de Biron," she said in a careless manner, "was always very fond of singing. He used to be greatly pleased with my poor attempts; for poor I declare they are, my little one, when compared with yours."

Azra now thought that she had an opportunity of saying a good word for Ivan. Though she

had become attached to the Princess, it was the hope of advocating Ivan's cause that had been Azra's first motive in coming to the palace of the Serbatoffs; and she resolved to be true to her original intention.

"Oh! Princess," she said, "if I might but tell you:—if you would but listen to me, when I say how much he loves you. We gypsy girls don't understand you great ladies. Ah me, if I had such a lover, and if I were a Princess, I would go away with him and be his, though he were only a poor gypsy youth."

"No doubt you would, my dear Azra. But we have a saying borrowed from the French, from whom we borrow most things, and it says *Noblesse oblige*. Translated into Russian, dear, it means that there can never be anything between your Ivan and the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff."

"Your Ivan! He is not mine, dear Princess. No loving thought of his ever wanders to me. I am as a serf to him, his and yours—sometimes useful to him, sometimes pleasing to him, but never loved. Ivan has but one love, and that is wholly given away. Oh that you could return his love, I should then be so happy."

The Princess smiled again, "So happy, Azra, is that quite truthful?"

Azra answered truthfully, or at least believed that she did so, when she replied. "Yes, it would be the greatest happiness in my life."

"What should you say, Azra, if we were to ask him some day to come and join us at our lessons? Do you think he would come?"

"Yes, he would. I know he would, even if we were at that Pelem, and he was in the big town of France where the king lives. I know he would."

"Then he shall come; and you shall invite him, Azra."

After this permission had been given, Azra took her departure, and hastened to announce the good news to Ivan.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER VII.

A MUSIC-LESSON AT THE SERBATOFF PALACE.

THE joy of Ivan was unbounded when Azra brought him the invitation to be present at the next music-lesson. From the depths of despair he was raised to the heights of hope. His first thought then, as he said to himself, was the true and the right one,—that before others, in a crowded ball-room, she was designedly and studiously cold; but that now their old intimacy was to be renewed.

How slowly the minutes sped for him, and how he hated the sluggish march of time during the three days that had to elapse before the next singing lesson at the Serbatoff Palace! He reckoned the number of those minutes, and told them off as they passed away, as children at school do when the holidays are almost in sight.

These same minutes passed but slowly too for the Princess Marie. Her soul was vexed by irreconcilable emotions; and when there is much

and various thought, time passes but slowly: days may appear to extend into months of life. The resolute woman was not always resolved: her thoughts wavered to and fro, now spell-bound by love, now governed by what she held to be the dictates of common sense, strengthened by her determined idea of self-sacrifice. Finally her first determination prevailed. She could not, and she would not, be his.

A woman can express much of her mind by her mode of dress, which often speaks a language unknown to the other sex. The Princess dressed herself for this lesson, with great care, and with a richness not very suitable to the occasion. But she desired as much as possible to dissociate the Princess Marie Andréeвна Serbatoff, so far as change of dress could effect the object, from her former peasant self, and so to signify to Ivan the change that he was to believe had taken place in her mind. What had been intimated in the ball-room was now to be confirmed. There was to be a complete effacement of those times when they were wont to sit side by side together in the forest of Pelem; when the contention was on her part to be allowed to do her share of the hard work; and when, too, as she blushed to think, very loving tokens of regard had, once or twice at least, been exchanged between them.

Azra came early to attend the music-lesson. The Princess had taken care not to be alone when Ivan should arrive. She need not have taken this precaution; for Ivan, proud as herself, would not anticipate the hour of their meeting: and when he did arrive, Herr Schmäl-der was in the room which, shortly afterwards Prince Serbatoff entered.

Meanwhile the Princess welcomed Ivan to her boudoir. And how did she receive him? As before, with the perfection of friendliness, but with refined and nice discretion. There is even something different between the welcome a girl gives to her brother, or her much-regarded cousin, and that which she bestows upon a much liked friend (not a lover) of her own age—perhaps her brother's friend. The warmest of such friendly welcomes was given to Ivan. In all ages, even when people talk most loudly of the decline of the Drama, there are still good actors on the stage; but, in all ages, the best, the most consummate acting, has been off the stage.

The lesson commenced. The principal personage was to be the Princess, and she did not dwarf her part. She sang well: indeed she sang her best. She did not condescend to little arts; and, moreover, she was aware that Ivan knew well what her musical powers were. At the same time she knew how far, as regards the natural gifts for song, Azra surpassed her. She knew, too, how the approval of others enhances, and often indeed reveals the merits of those whose excellence we have before but carelessly, if at all, observed. She meant that Ivan should fully understand and appreciate the great gifts of Azra as a songstress.

Even as regards dress, she had been as careful for Azra as she had been for herself; and it had been a pretty and touching sight, which presented itself in the half-hour before Ivan arrived, while the loving woman (almost unconsciously we speak of the Princess as a woman, and of Azra as a girl), was seeking to make her young rival appear to the utmost possible advantage.

The Princess, as it has been said, sang well. It must have been better than usual, for she received warm praise from Herr Schmälder, a cold man, very little given to praise, and utterly indifferent to the rank or station of his pupils. Indeed, Herr Schmälder would not have honoured the greatest lady in St. Petersburg, hardly even the Empress herself, by his teaching, if he had perceived no germs of talent in her. He *had* been the singing-master of the Empress; and certain rude speeches of his to his Imperial pupil were well known at Court.

"Upon my word it was excellent," he exclaimed, "I am very proud of you, Princess (he had never said that to her before), and I am sure the Prince must be so, too."

The Princess began to fear, lest, in her desire to be true to her part, she had gone beyond it, and she felt somewhat anxious as to whether Azra would fulfil her expectations.

Azra was now invited, and indeed pressed, to sing. Herr Schmälder, not understanding any of the bye-play that was being enacted before him, was astonished at Azra's reluctance. The gypsy girl had hitherto been utterly free from any bashfulness; and had always done at once, and with her best endeavour, whatever Herr Schmälder had desired her to do. He thought, poor innocent man, that Azra was afraid of the Prince; and, as the great musician had the utmost contempt for the Prince's scant knowledge of music, he was somewhat indignant that any one who had ventured to sing before him, great in Vienna, renowned in Paris, the best teacher, as he thought himself, in the world (with the exception of Porpora) should care about the approval, or disapproval, of an ordinary Russian

Prince ; a species of well-bred savage, as, in the pride of art, Herr Schmäldeſter deemed him to be.

The maſtro ſcolded Azra roundly ; and, as if to puniſh her, choſe one of the moſt difficult works to execute which could have been put before any beginner. She had, however, been tried in it before. He knew, therefore, that ſhe could do it admirably. And ſo ſhe did. The very confidence which, ariſing from her ſimplicity, the gypſy girl generally manifeſted in her ſinging, was broken down on this occaſion ; and there was a certain exquisite tremulousneſs brought into play, which had never been known in her ſinging on any previous occaſion.

The ſucceſs was very great. The Prince was in ecſtaſies ; and Herr Schmäldeſter threw from his forehead, with both hands, his large maſſes of unkempt hair, which with him was a ſign of the utmoſt approval.

The eyes of the Princeſs and of Azra turned to the countenance of Ivan. In it there was aſtoniſhment, there was approbation ; but both of the girls felt that Ivan was leſs charmed than either of the other by-ſtanders. He, alone, expreſſed a wiſh for the Princeſs to ſing again. She reſolutely declined, ſaying that, after ſuch ſinging as Azra's, it was but cruel kindneſs to her, to aſk her to diſplay her manifeſt inferiority. At this moment ſhe had her arm round Azra's ſlender waſt, and was regarding her with much fondneſs. The Princeſs had now thrown herſelf fully into her part, and for the moment was a devotee to Azra. In truth ſhe was a little angry with Ivan for his not ſympathiſing with her in her admiration of the gypſy girl.

The muſic-lesson degenerated into a converſa-

tion about music, occasionally varied by the maestro's making Azra repeat, after instructions given by himself, certain parts of the concerted piece in which she had so distinguished herself. And then Herr Schmälder, whose minutes were very precious, and who could not outstay his time, took his leave. The Princess, by some slight indication, conveyed to Azra that she also should leave the room.

Then the Princess, after much praise of Azra's singing, in which she was heartily seconded by her father, began to speak with him about Ivan's future career.

"You know, dear father, how good he was to us when we were in Siberia. Our fires would not have cheered us at eventime, if it had not been for him. We can never do enough to show our gratitude to this true friend."

Ivan absolutely loathed this kind of conversation, occurring, too, in his presence; but the old courtier, on the contrary, revelled in it. It gave him an opportunity for displaying all his worldly wisdom; and, with advice not far different from that of Polonius, did he show most indisputably how Ivan was to rise at Court, to which altitude the Prince would give his best aid to raise him. His Excellency entered minutely into the character of their present Empress; and Ivan, even while he could hardly master his disgust at being treated as he was by the Princess, could not help being somewhat amused by the real skill which the Prince manifested in delineating a character which, as His Excellency thought, was worthy of the utmost and most minute investigation. Of the feelings of those persons who surrounded him during that hour of the music-lesson, and of the play (tragedy, or comedy, it would be difficult to

say which), that had been enacted before him, the Prince was profoundly unobservant and unconscious; but he knew well the characters of his colleagues, and of his Imperial Mistress; and not the slightest of their gestures, or their expressions, was ever lost upon him.

Ivan lingered on; but if he did so with a hope of being, for a moment, alone with the Princess, he was much mistaken in that hope. The old courtier was in his proper element. He was showing alike his gratitude and his sagacity; and, if Ivan had stayed for another hour, the Prince would hardly have desisted from making the most of an opportunity, so welcome to him, as that of instructing a young man, a very excellent young man, in the sure art, sure at least to those who know how to make good use of it, of rising at Court.

There were one or two sayings uttered by the Prince which much impressed Ivan at the time, and which, long afterwards, lingered in his memory. "The greatest man of this age, my young friend, would be the man who should know everything, and yet hold his tongue."

Doubtless, the word 'everything' meant everything at Court or connected with Government, which, according to this accomplished courtier, was the only knowledge upon earth worth having.

Another of the Prince's sayings was "Above all things, do not be anxious to shine: if shine you must, let it be in broad daylight, not when all around you is dark. The glowworm has the shortest life of all insects."

The Prince may have been inaccurate in his natural history; but his maxim is not in other respects untruthful. The German poet Pieffel

has given an exquisite fable to the same effect:—

The toad spat all his venom at a glow-worm. "What have I done to you?" asks the poor worm. "Why did you shine?" was the toad's reply.*

When Ivan moved to go away, the Prince moved too, and accompanied him even to the door of the palace, shaking hands warmly with him, reiterating scraps of sound and wholesome advice, and saying what pleasure it would give him to be of any service to his young friend.

The previous parting between the Princess and Ivan was also most friendly, "odiously friendly," was Ivan's bitter thought. How much can be expressed in the shaking of hands! It can tell everything; and how infinitely various it is!—from the tremulous, faint, tender pressure which physically is so slight, and metaphysically so significant, to the warm, hearty, wholesome pressure which means liking and friendship to any extent; but not love: no, not love, never to be love.

It was this latter form which the Princess, not perhaps with perfect success, strove to adopt at this parting.

The Prince was a little deaf; and the Princess without fear of being overheard, could say to Ivan as they parted, "It can never be; no, dear

*Ein Johanniswürmchen saß,
Seines Demantscheins
Unbewußt, im weichen Gras
Eines Eichenhäus.

Leise schlich aus faulem Moos
Sich ein Ungethüm,

Eine Kröte, her und schloß
All ihr Gift nach ihm.

"Ach, was hab' ich dir gethan?"
Rief der Wurm ihr zu.

"Ei," fuhr ihn das Unthier an,
"Warum glänzeſt du?"

G. Konr. Pfefferl.

Ivan, it can never be." And, the moment after she had spoken, she regretted, as being a failure in the perfection of her acting, that she had said "dear Ivan." He did not reply in words; but his reproachful look—calm, indignant, and reproachful—was never effaced from the recollection of the Princess.

When alone, she did not endeavour to conceal from herself her anguish of mind. No look, no movement of his, save when she was singing, had escaped her attention. There was a certain gesture of his, when he was pleased, which was well known to her. She had often playfully ridiculed him about it. When he was exceedingly pleased, he had a way of bringing his hands together, and then spreading them out widely. It was a gesture which he told her he had learnt from his Italian mother in early childhood; and, though it was not in harmony with Russian manners, he had never been able to break himself of it. It dwelt upon the memory of the Princess as she had seen it on an occasion very memorable to her, when, in that wood at Pelem (oh! that she were there again!) he had declared his love, and she had not denied hers.

In this trying hour which had just passed, she had, almost involuntarily, looked for this gesture of approval from Ivan. It had come after she had sung: it had not come after Azra had sung. The Princess felt how large and deep must be the prejudice of love when it could claim for her that superiority of approval and of interest which ought undoubtedly to have been given to Azra. With that vast inconsistency which even the most persistent and resolute among us betray, she had been delighted, as she now owned to herself, that this mark of approval had been given to her rather than to the other.

“ My own, my dearest, my best-beloved Ivan,” she exclaimed to herself, “ you will yet become a great man—the lord of many serfs mayhap ; and how I envy the meanest of them, who, upon some act of graciousness—for you will be very gracious—has the joy and the delight of kissing your dear hand. Oh ! would I were that serf.”

Meanwhile Ivan’s hope had turned to the blackest despair, the despair being only mitigated, if so it may be said, by fury at her attempt to patronize him. Patronizing instead of loving ! there cannot be anything which would evoke more indignation in the breast of a lover than this substitution of patronage for love.

It would be idle to say how many times Ivan repeated to himself the words of the Scriptures “ Put not your trust in Princes,” and how bitterly he arraigned the constitution of the world which had, so fatally for him, as he thought, created difference of rank amongst mankind.

Ivan’s hope, raised as it had been by the invitation to the Serbatoff Palace, had presented to his mind an image as glowing and beautiful as any gorgeous sunset ; and now it had vanished as rapidly as that—the most fleeting phenomenon in nature. The lover calls his mistress to the window, to partake his delight ; but when, hastening, she looks forth, it mostly happens that the glow has become faint, and the threatening clouds which made so large a part of the past beauty, are beginning to resume the dullness of their native colour.

The feelings of the Princess may best be described by the word anguish : those of Ivan by despair : those of Azra by bewilderment. Her trained habits of observation had not been

laid aside during this important hour. Men understand men, women understood women, with an understanding that is not vouchsafed to persons of different sexes. One look—it was but one—when the Princess with infinite but unconsciously-expressed tenderness, had gazed at Ivan after she had sung her song, had not been lost upon Azra. She wondered, with a wonderment that found no explanation to diminish it, how any woman could love a man so fondly, so devotedly, as she felt the Princess loved Ivan, and yet be cold to him, be merely friendly. And Azra said to herself that there was a world of thought and feeling among the great people of the earth, which those of her despised birth and breeding could not enter into, and could hardly imagine.

BOOK V.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER I.

A PRIMA DONNA AND HER LOVERS.

THE lives, even of adventurous men, move with much uniformity. There may be great mental changes, recognized, or not recognized, by the men themselves; but events of any signal kind, are, for years together, not frequent even for those whose lives are considered to be eventful. And so it was with some of the principal personages whose fortunes are related in this story.

Elizabeth's tenure of power, at first so dubious and so liable to change, had now some firmness in it. The foreign policy of Russia was beginning to be a subject of the gravest consideration for the other European Powers; and the home policy of the new Czarina was impressed, as far as it could be impressed by one mind combating against many, with the most marked feature of her character,—clemency: so that by writers of that period she is justly spoken of as 'Elizabeth the Clement.'

There was the usual waste of money, which, for

one or two generations, had been notably felt in Russia. Elizabeth loved splendour of all kinds, and was devoted to the most expensive of all tastes—that of building. It may be remarked that, for the greater part of the eighteenth century, there was a fearful propensity to extravagant expenditure of every kind, at all the principal courts of Europe—an expenditure which, of itself, was sure to lead to great political changes. This private expenditure, however, if so it may be called, did not induce any parsimony in the worst of all forms of public expenditure—that of war.

Foreign warfare, except in its baneful effect of increased taxation, does not much affect the lives of ordinary citizens; and so, comparing the first years of Elizabeth's reign with the two or three preceding years abounding in great domestic events and startling revolutions, the time passed tamely on in Russia. Elizabeth was not vexed, like her great English namesake, by the expression of an urgent wish on the part of her subjects that she should marry, and thus provide a direct heir to the throne. There probably never was a female sovereign who was less favourably disposed to marriage than Elizabeth of Russia.

The succession to the throne was carefully provided for, the Empress choosing her nephew Peter, the Duke of Holstein, as her successor. She afterwards married him to the beautiful and accomplished Catharine, Princess of Anhaltzerbst,—little imagining, that by so doing she was practically ensuring a female succession to the throne—a succession to be gained by murder.

Three or four years of this comparative quiescence at the Russian Court had now elapsed; and, for the readers of this narrative, more interest

is to be found in what was taking place at Paris than at St. Petersburg.

In a room, in one of the hotels of Paris, there sat a lady and gentleman. The room was handsomely furnished; but there was noticeable a certain carelessness, not to say untidiness, in the way in which articles of dress and adornment were strewn about the apartment. Sheets of music were scattered everywhere. Splendid ornaments, some of them half in and half out of their cases, were to be seen lying about, as if they were unconsidered trifles. Silks and satins, and head gear of various kinds, were also to be seen; and the whole aspect of the room created an impression that the owner of it was rich, careless, and either very much accustomed, or very little accustomed, to the splendour that surrounded her.

Her own dress conveyed the same idea. It was magnificent, and yet betrayed an appearance of negligence. She wore a long purple velvet gown, confined by a girdle, seemingly of emeralds set in gold, which, if it were real, must have been of almost inestimable value.

She was a beautiful young woman, and though small in stature, and of delicate features, had an air of command which was in strange contrast with this smallness and this delicacy. Upon her countenance there was a look of much determination, and yet of much anxiety, as of one who was about to make a great attempt, and would do so with all the force that was in her; but, at the same time, was by no means sure of the result. She seemed as if she were listening for something or somebody; and her thoughts were evidently far away from the present scene.

The countenance of her companion also betrayed anxiety, though of a different kind. It was a beseeching anxiety, and full of the present moment.

When he spoke to her he called her "Dearest;" when she replied, she called him "Baron;" and sometimes she failed to give the proper answers to his questions. He spoke of the past: her thoughts were evidently of the future. There was an air of patronage about her mode of dealing with the young man. It could not be that she had the 'advantage' of him, as they say, in age, for he was about twenty-eight years of age and she twenty-four.

She had, too, the manner of a *grande dame*, such as was to be seen in that age renowned for *grandes dames*. And yet it could hardly be said that she was "to the manner born," but it was as if she played the part, though playing it admirably. In her hand she held a tuning-fork; and more than once she struck this upon the table, and listened carefully to the sound.

The Baron was depreciating Paris—a theme which was manifestly not very acceptable to the lady.

"Our beautiful Neva!" he exclaimed, "who can compare this wretched muddy rivulet, the Seine, with our Neva? Do you remember, dearest, our first walk by star-light on its banks near to the Church of St. Isaac's? Every word you then said dwells in my memory, and ever will remain there."

"Yes, Baron," she listlessly replied, "it was a fearful time for both of us. Had I been discovered, it would have been my death."

"You look ill, dearest," he replied "Oh! that I could do for you what you once did for me! Why will you continue to slave in this way, when there is no need for it?"

"Do not say that. There is need for it, and never more than to-day."

He took her left hand (he was sitting on a sofa by her side) and raised it to his lips. She did not make any objection to this proceeding, but seemed to take it as a matter of course; and, as he afterwards laid his hand upon the table near her, she played upon it with her fingers, evidently recalling some air; for at the same time she struck the tuning-fork, and softly sang this air. It was the well-known melody in the third act of *Les Indes Galantes*, a favourite opera in those days.

At this moment there was a knock at the street door, and then the sound of ascending foot-steps. The lady's colour went and came; and a deeper shade of anxiety overspread her countenance. Whoever this was that was coming up the stairs, he was either very dear to her, or he brought news that would have the deepest interest for her.

A servant announced 'Count Gluck;' and, thereupon, a middle-aged man entered the room. He was unmistakably a diplomatist, and there was that look of fine observation, and even of subtlety, which might be seen in most of the diplomatists of that age, when diplomacy was rather apt to degenerate into mere state-craft.

As the Count entered, the Baron's countenance fell; and a look of almost undisguised hatred sat upon his face. Totally regardless of the young man, Count Gluck advanced hastily to the lady,

and whispered to her these words: "His Majesty will come. It is all settled. He comes in State."

The lady's face became radiant with joy. "This is indeed, good news, Count Gluck. I had hardly ventured to hope for such an honour."

After this, the conversation deviated into the ordinary topics of the day, such as the restoration to health of the King, the new mode which the Parisian ladies had adopted for dressing their hair, and the like. Suddenly the lady asked: "Is there any intelligence, Count, about that man I told you of? Do the police know anything?"

"Nothing," Count Gluck replied.

"What man?" said the Baron.

"It is one," replied the lady, "who ever haunts my steps—a gloomy-looking fellow, of a swarthy hue, rather shorter than the ordinary size of men, with a scar over his left eyebrow; and you can see that he is slightly lame when he walks."

"You did not give me all these details before," said the Count, who began to make a memorandum of them at a writing-table, at the other end of the room. Meanwhile the lady whispered to the Baron: "Limbar, the man I told you of before, our old enemy. I shudder when I see that man; and he is always there."

Both the Baron and the Count endeavoured to reassure the lady, declaring that they would keep watch upon this man. From her description they would certainly be able to detect his presence. The conversation then languished.

The rivals, for such they were, endeavoured to

outstay one another, as is the wont of rivals in such cases.

The wily diplomatist, however, was the first to go, for he soon perceived that it was the lady's wish to be alone; and he easily conjectured the reason. It was his cue never to be tedious, or to make his visits otherwise than most welcome. When he had gone, the lady did not hesitate, using the familiarity of an old friend, to bid the other go.

"You see, my dear," she exclaimed (this was the first time she had called him 'dear') "I have not a moment to lose. Signor Scala is coming, and I do not feel at all sure of myself." The young man reluctantly departed.

Alas for constancy! Alas for truthfulness in love! The great lady was no other than the gypsy girl Azra, the Baron no other than Ivan de Biron.

Azra, in the course of the last few years, had, in accordance with the plan so well-devised and so well carried out by the Princess Marie, gone upon the stage; had become a prima donna; had enjoyed several triumphs at St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Vienna; and was now to make her début before the critical audience of Paris. No wonder that she was anxious! No wonder that she was delighted to hear that his Most Christian Majesty, by means of the good Count Gluck's persevering efforts at Court, would attend her first performance! and no wonder that she was most desirous on this day to get rid of her admirers, that she might devote herself to frequent rehearsals of her part!

To an unobservant person it might seem, that Azra's nature was entirely altered; but it was not so. Her character had always been a very

simple one; and the change was merely this—that instead of greatly loving any human being, she greatly loved her art, and was absorbed by it. Those only who have swayed hundreds or thousands of their fellow-beings by the magic power of eloquent speech, or captivating song, can realize what it is to meet the answering eyes of all those faces directed towards them, and to feel that each individual soul of the great audience in front of them is moved by their emotions, subdued by their thoughts, and led into perfect harmony with them by the supreme development of whatever thought or passion it is their pleasure, for the moment, to evoke. Those who have this rare power, whether they be great speakers, or great singers, or great actors, seldom care much for minor influences. Their love, if love it may be called, is apt to be of a universal character, and appeals not to any one person, but to humanity in general.

And so it fared with Azra. She had at one time loved, and loved hopelessly, the first true gentleman she had ever known. And this was Ivan. But now he was, as it were, but one of a crowd to her; and the renowned songstress, who was also a great actress, could hardly be said to love anything else but her divine art.

And Ivan—the good and true Ivan, what had become of his constancy of nature? The Princess Marie had been but too skilful. Her plans had but too well succeeded, and Ivan had, almost unconsciously, succumbed to the attractions of her rival. We are all largely influenced by the effect of general approbation; and often we only then recognize the merits of those whom we have lived with and seen ever so closely, when these

merits are brought into full light by alien applause. Hardly any distance renders vision so dull and makes the perceptive powers so feebly apprehensive, as the fatal nearness of familiarity can do. It was when Ivan ceased to see Azra daily, and when she became the leading personage on the boards of the theatres of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Vienna, that he found out how beautiful, how charming, how adorable she was.

Court favour in Russia, at that period, was a plant of rapid though not of hardy growth. A favoured courtier sprang forward, rather than walked, towards the object of his ambition. Thus, in the course of the last few years, Ivan de Biron, who at first had held but an inferior post in the Imperial Palace, had attracted the notice, and even the loving regard (so scandal unjustly said) of the Empress Elizabeth; and had certainly become one of her most favoured dependants.

His rise had been aided in no inconsiderable degree by his own merits. The early training he had received, had fitted him for the conduct of great affairs; and there were few men at the Russian Court more capable of directing those affairs, notwithstanding his comparative youthfulness, than Ivan de Biron.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRIMA DONNA'S DÉBUT IN PARIS.

THE second effort, when the first has been successful, is the perilous one. The most trying of all rivals has then entered on the scene, the image of one's former crowned self. This is true, whether the effort be made in speech, in poetry, in song, or even, perhaps, in some athletic achievement.

Her first appearance on the Parisian stage was Azra's second effort. The audiences before whom she had hitherto appeared, were somewhat similar—at any rate as regards the value attached to them by great artists, for even Vienna was not held to be equivalent in that respect to Paris, which then, and long afterwards, was the supreme arbiter in all matters of taste. Moreover, Azra partook the feelings of her race. Those cosmopolitan gypsies had a great respect for, and fear of, France. Perhaps it was that the laws respecting them were stricter and more severely enforced in France

than elsewhere. Russia was, and is, a country where all tribes may bivouac, as it were; no tribe presuming to interfere with the despotic government, or indeed, venturing to profess any set of political opinions.

Azra, too, was well aware that her musical education had not been of that finished kind possessed by those who had hitherto acquired Parisian celebrity.

Again, the occasion was a great one. The King had not for some time favoured the Opera with his royal presence; and Louis the Fifteenth was still *Louis le Bien-aimé*.

For two or three hours before the commencement of the Opera, the avenues to the Opera-House had been kept by the soldiery; and even Azra's servants, who had not known that it was necessary to obtain a pass, found considerable difficulty in bringing their mistress's carriage to the stage entrance. She had herself more than once to explain to the officers on guard, who she was; and would not then have gained her point, if the badness of her French had not gone far to verify her statement.

The Prima Donna, as at least she hoped to be, and certainly was for that occasion, arrived at her dressing-room in a state of much agitation. The enterprise seemed to be greater to her than she had ever hitherto imagined it to be; and the resolute woman began to fear that she should quail before the critical audience she had now to encounter. Those terrors, which had beset her when she first appeared on the stage of St. Petersburg, in a part comparatively inferior, were resumed, and, indeed, greatly augmented, on this her first appearance at the Grand Opera of Paris.

There is a proverb of some European nation, which says something of this kind : "The mess is never eaten quite so hot as it was when it left the kitchen" — a homely proverb, but a consoling one. And it is especially true, when the mess has been cooked by imagination, creating a heat which happily the reality never quite equals.

Azra came upon the stage : and, after those first few moments, when the heart beats so violently that the voice cannot express itself, during which the eyes refuse to see anything distinctly, and all is wrapt in a mist of terror and confusion, Azra began to resume somewhat of her wonted presence of mind.

There was, however, a forced silence on her part which lasted nearly two minutes, a period that seemed to her almost an infinity of time. The good-natured audience recognized her embarrassment, and filled up this ugly interval by loud and continued plaudits.

It was the fashion in those days for people to be punctual in their attendance at public entertainments ; and the King himself had arrived before the curtain was drawn up. Lastly, to add to the excitement, the Opera was somewhat of a novelty. It had only been performed twice in the course of the preceding year ; and there were many experienced connoisseurs who had never heard it.

In the course of the first Act, it could only be said that Azra was tolerably successful ; and her success threatened to be of that somewhat humiliating kind, so hateful to those who aim at the first place, which is called a "*succès d'estime*." The invention of this phrase, peculiarly French, indicates how skilful the Parisians are in criticism.

During the interval between the first and second acts, many a criticism was first started by some connoisseur, and then passed on to the receptive crowd, about a G in alto being defective, about a want of volume in the voice, and about a *fioritura* being happier in the design than in the execution. There were those who said that this was all very well for St. Petersburg, but was not quite the thing for Paris.

Another remark was, moreover, made: but chiefly by the ladies—that the dress was *bizarre*. And indeed it was *bizarre*; for Azra, with that independence of nature which was peculiar to her, had adopted a dress of her own for the part. She had not had the prudence to ascertain, and to imitate, the costume for her part which had been adopted in the two previous representations by her predecessor, and which had, of course, followed French fashions.

It may be well, parenthetically, to mention that whether, from their untravelled simplicity, their better taste, or their freedom from conventionality, the Russian audiences were, in fact, better judges of costume than the Parisians.

Azra's skill in dress was really exquisite; and she had hitherto followed that good rule of taste which made her adopt, in all cases, some costume which was especially suitable to her self. The Russians not only recognized this; but they had been pleased and amused at the gypsiness, as they had called it, which had always been visible in Azra's costume. At first she had come out with an Italian name, and professing to be an Italian; but too many persons had heard and seen her at the concerts of Russian Princes, to be deceived by that assumption of a foreign name.

The second Act commenced. Azra was more herself than she had been in the previous Act. The King was seen gently to approve; but this gentleness of approval, for Louis held himself to be a great connoisseur, was considered to mean much. There were now some persons in the audience, even amongst the learned, who having Royalty on their side, ventured to maintain doctrines differing from those of the more critical connoisseurs about the "G in alto and the volume of the voice." Still it was not by any means an acknowledged or an assured success; and the great body of the audience waited with an anxious and uncertain expectation as to what would be the result of the third Act, in which a celebrated duet between the Prima Donna and the first tenor was to be sung.

We must pass, however, from their feelings and expectations, to those of three persons who were present in the Opera-House, and who took a far deeper interest in the proceedings than any common spectator. These were Count Gluck, Ivan de Biron, and Limbar the gypsy.

Count Gluck was exceedingly anxious as to the result. That result for him would be failure, if Azra failed. The astute diplomatist knew that his chance of winning the love of Azra, depended upon his furtherance of her success as a great singer. No diplomatic effort of his had been made with more art and skill than that by which he had succeeded in inducing Louis the Fifteenth to honour the opera by his presence, on this occasion. The Count, himself a good musician, had ventured in the least marked manner (being most anxious that the King should think the criticisms were his own),

to point out passages wherein Azra had shown the peculiar excellence of her voice or of her genius as an actress. The Count felt what was the nature, though he could not hear what was the substance, of the remarks which were made by the connoisseurs in the pit; and, for the moment, he almost regretted that he had given so much time and thought to bringing the King and the courtiers to the opera, and that he had not previously had some dealings with the connoisseurs and with the formidable band of *claqueurs* who were present.

Ivan's feelings were of a very different kind. He was not at all disturbed by the adverse criticism which, during the interval between the first and second Acts, he had heard in his place in the pit. Though he would not have owned this to any one else, he did not particularly desire that Azra should be successful. He had hitherto—with strange inconsistency—at the same time loved and loathed that success. Now, as he told himself, he did anything but long for her success; for he felt that if it were gained, it would only remove Azra further and further from him. Loving her, too, as he did, he viewed with a fierce envy, quite needless if he had known what great actresses and great singers feel, the affectionate demonstrations which Azra, completely fulfilling her part in this respect, lavished upon the first tenor, to whom she was not merely supremely indifferent, but for whom she had a positive dislike, seeing that he was a pedantic kind of young man who had vainly sought to instruct her as to the dress and manner in which she should perform her part; his notions of that dress and manner having been impressed upon him by the Prima Donna who had played the same part in the preceding year.

Ivan, however, had little time or thought to give to Azra's success or failure, or to the endearments she might bestow upon her transitory stage-lover. The words which Azra had said to him respecting the gypsy, Limbar, dwelt in his mind. He felt, with a kindred feeling, why it was that this dangerous man had haunted her steps. From the first moment of Ivan's entrance into the theatre, his attention had been given to ascertaining whether Limbar was present. He could not find him anywhere. He searched the pit: he looked over the boxes. There was no Limbar there; nor, indeed, as Ivan felt, was he likely to be there.

The gallery in those days, when gas had not been invented, was too obscure for Ivan to recognize from a distance any countenance in the motley assemblage gathered there. But, between the acts, he had made his way to the gallery, and had in vain sought to discover any face which he could say was that of the gypsy. Ivan, moreover, thought he knew the face, for he too, in his frequent attendance while Azra was playing at St. Petersburg and Moscow, had not failed to notice this man. Ivan loved Azra with a love greatly surpassing that of the courtier and diplomatist, Count Gluck. Her apprehension of danger from Limbar had made a deep impression upon Ivan; and he feared for her safety. Perhaps we should not do him wrong in conjecturing that he imagined that if he could render some signal service to Azra, such as the prevention of any daring scheme that Limbar might have in his wild mind to the detriment of Azra, her old love for himself might be renewed in all its former fulness and sincerity.

And what were Limbar's thoughts? This

savage lover had not followed Azra from place to place without an object. He was desperate; and had resolved that he would at least be the death of any favoured lover. Strangely enough, his suspicions had not fallen upon Ivan, upon Count Gluck, or upon any other of Azra's numerous admirers in the upper ranks of society. Limbar, deceived by the mimic passions of the stage, was ready to believe that Azra really loved those whom the necessities of life upon the stage compelled her to appear to love. Narrowly had the *jeunes premiers* at St. Petersburg and Moscow escaped death at Limbar's hands; and it was only that knowledge which the gypsies of that day, and perhaps of this, possess of the real loves and likings which those whom they watch, entertain, that had hitherto preserved the Russian *jeunes premiers*.

The third Act commenced. In the course of this act the business of the stage made it necessary that Azra should be very ardent in her demonstrations of love to her then recovered lover. And she did not underact her part. Any rude, untutored mind might well believe that she doated with a real affection upon the hero of the stage. Limbar's feelings of envy and jealousy were excited to the uttermost. At the end of that duet when Azra embraced and clung about the beloved tenor, a pistol shot resounded through the theatre. Azra was seen to fall; and was carried away bleeding from the stage.

The house was in tumult and confusion. The King was seen to leave his box, for Louis the Fifteenth was really agitated by the event. We must not inquire too curiously whether such an admirer of beauty as that monarch, might not

be anxious to see the new singer more closely, as well as to render some assistance to her. The King, with that quickness of observation for which he was renowned, had perceived at once that the injury could not be a fatal one, or even of a serious character. Indeed, the wound, which was in the left arm, was but slight, the bullet having done little more than grazed the surface.

Shortly afterwards, Count Gluck, who had followed the King, was seen to return to the Royal box ; and, after whispering to one of the *dames d'honneur* of the Queen, to take away her lace shawl.

Almost immediately afterwards, the manager came forward and made a short speech, stating that the attempted assassination had had but little effect ; that the Signora was but slightly wounded ; and, in ten minutes, would again courageously appear before them. This announcement was, of course, received with thunders of applause.

Meanwhile, Limbar had disappeared ; and, notwithstanding all the vigilance of the Parisian police, was not arrested.

The remainder of the third Act was suppressed ; but Azra came on the stage at the appointed time in the fourth Act, the injury to her arm, and its bandages, being concealed by the lace shawl which Count Gluck had taken from the *dame d'honneur*. From that moment, monarch and people vied in their plaudits of encouragement.

Azra, to whom those plaudits gave new life, sang with a force, a spirit, and even with a correctness that she had never manifested, on the stage, before. In fact she sang as well as

she had often sung when alone. Her triumph was complete.

One person only went home from the opera that night saddened and dispirited, hopeless indeed of future favour, and infinitely regretful of having missed a golden opportunity.

This person was Ivan de Biron.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER III.

IVAN LEAVES PARIS, AND RETURNS TO ST. PETERS-
BURG—STATE OF AFFAIRS AT ST. PETERSBURG.

THE enthusiasm at Paris in favour of the new singer was immense. Whenever she appeared on the stage, she was welcomed with the utmost fervour. The throwing of bouquets was a mode of recognizing merit not invented in that day. Encores were infrequent; and that wonderfully absurd practice of calling on the principal actors and actresses to appear at the end of an act, whereby whatever illusion remains for the stage, is in danger of being utterly dispelled,* had not been adopted, or even attempted. But whatever demonstrations of ap-

* This absurdity culminates, when you see the tyrant and the slave—the rejected lover and the accepted lover—the prisoner and his jailer—come on, hand in hand, to receive the plaudits of an unthinking crowd that does not seem to know the first and humblest principles of the art which they are doing what they can to destroy by their ill-considered demands.

proval were then in vogue, Azra enjoyed a full share of them.

A hundred romantic stories were invented about her: she was loudly greeted when seen in the street; and even grave personages paid court to her, thinking it not improbable that she might supersede the royal favourite of the day.

Ivan saw and heard these demonstrations with gloom and vexation of spirit. Even Count Gluck began to fear lest Azra's success should prove too great for his designs, and quite remove her from anything like patronage on his part.

Azra would have been more than mortal, if she had not been touched and gratified by this almost overwhelming success. Still there a certain element of vexation to her also. She felt that much of this acclamation was due to the incident of Limbar's attempt upon her life. She had hoped to triumph by her art alone; and, even, as regards that, she felt all the humility and depression of mind which, except with very vain people, is sure to attend any great success.

Ivan's stay at Paris was limited. He had only leave of absence for a certain time, and did not dare to exceed that time. Indeed, the very perilous circumstances in which every Russian Courtier at that period was placed—circumstances well known to Ivan—made him fear that he had lost much ground by venturing to be absent at all from St. Petersburg.

It has been said that it was rather a dull and uneventful period at the Russian Court; and that Elizabeth's power was consolidated. Still there was some latent dissatisfaction, which had not escaped Ivan's notice. The first enthusiasm

which pervaded Russia on Elizabeth's seizure of the throne, had considerably subsided. The new favourites, many of them men of low origin and insignificant pretensions, had behaved with the insolence and rapaciousness that were to be expected from them. Lestocq was as giddy, vain, and loquacious as ever. The Preobrajenski guards astonished St. Petersburg by their follies of speech and action, and their lavish expenditure. Indeed, they had conducted themselves much as the graver men had done in the short preceding reign of the Duchess Regent, when even Count Münnich, making too much profit of his favour, had lost that favour both with the Duchess Regent and his Colleagues. It requires great discretion for one, who has been a King-maker, to retain the favour of the Sovereign he has made, by not presuming too much upon his handiwork; and it was not to be expected that such persons as these common soldiers of the guard, should conduct themselves discreetly.

It is desirable to refer to the fall of Münnich, for had that vigorous and active man been in favour at St. Petersburg when Lestocq's conspiracy was formed it is very unlikely that it would have succeeded.

It was not a time, as Ivan thought to himself, for him to be absent from Court; and yet, perhaps, it would have been well for him, if he had prolonged his stay at Paris. But this he did not venture to do.

Ivan was too sensible a man to put his hopes to the final test on the occasion of his departure, and to ask Azra, once for all, whether she would marry him: "Not now," he said to himself, "not now, while she is intoxicated with success,

will I make the great venture of my life." Determined, too, as he was, to withdraw her from the stage if she should become his wife, he felt that the present moment would be the worst to choose for such a project. Here, again, he was wrong; for it is after failure—failure which is felt by the person failing to be undeserved—that there is least chance of persuading that person to relinquish the course of life which he or she has adopted. Success may cause satiety: failure, never.

Before leaving Paris, Ivan contrived, though with much difficulty, to have private interviews with Azra. In the course of one of these interviews, he presumed to warn her against the intentions of Count Gluck. He is a bad man, Ivan said, a crafty, dissembling, self-seeking man. "He would never have loved you, Azra, if he had known you first, when I did. It is not the gypsy, Azra, so dear to me in those past days, but the celebrated Signora Hurtaldi that Count Gluck pays court to, hoping doubtless, thereby to re-establish his own precarious fortunes."

Azra answered coldly. Indeed she could answer without any effort to control emotion; for, at this moment, she was heart-free; and, if the truth must be told, all the time that Ivan was talking, she was thinking *more* of a new part she had to play, than of anything "dear good Ivan" as she called him to herself, was saying to her.

One topic, with signal want of judgment, Ivan finally ventured to touch upon. It related to Louis the Fifteenth. This did recall Azra from any thoughts about her new part, and roused her indignation greatly. Among the

rude people of her tribe, if there was coarseness of speech, there was a certain purity of life which made such an allusion to a wicked possibility an undoubted insult in Azra's eyes. Poor Ivan did all that he could to efface the impression which his unwary words had made. But he had not succeeded in doing so, before she was summoned for rehearsal. The interview was obliged to be abruptly broken off; and Azra and Ivan parted from one another with more sorrow and regret on his part, with less liking on hers, than they had ever known before.

How changed was the aspect of things from what it had been in those days when Azra was the sole comfort to Ivan in his trouble and his desolation; when she was his only confidante; or when she shared those lessons with the Princess Marie at which she only assisted, in the hope and belief, as she said to herself, that she should be the means of reconciling the lovers—a sorrowful hope which, when for a moment it seemed likely to be realized, had filled her heart with a terror and an anguish that, despite of all her noble endeavours at self-sacrifice, she could not overcome.

Gladly now, and with a thorough sense of relief, she heard the sound of the departing wheels of Baron Ivan de Biron's carriage, as it proceeded on its way to Vincennes, the first stage on the road from Paris to St. Petersburg.

The only words that Ivan might have been heard to exclaim, if there had been any one to overhear him, were "What will Kalynch say now?"

BOOK V.



CHAPTER IV.

KALYNCH AND HIS THEORY

"WHAT will Kalynch say now?" This had become a proverbial saying amongst all those people who had the good fortune to be acquainted with Kalynch.

And who was Kalynch? He was an honest Courlander, who had long been a servant in the Biron family, and had accompanied the Duke of Courland when he came with the Empress Anne to Russia.

Kalynch had lately been entrusted with private despatches from his Highness at Jaroslaw to Ivan; and Ivan had, with the Duke's permission, retained him in his own service for a time, being very desirous at this critical period to have one faithful friend and servant whom he could thoroughly rely upon.

There are many faithful servants, however, who do not acquire in their own circle the celebrity of Kalynch; or, as regards whom, any

anxiety is expressed as to what they will say upon any particular occasion.

But Kalynch had a theory—one which, according to his opinion, rendered plain the doubtful matters of this troublesome world, and was of universal application.

It is often said that neither good fortune, nor evil fortune, lasts long; and there are pleasant proverbs to somewhat of the same effect, such as “The darkest hour of the night is just before the dawn.”

But these are vague sayings, which only shadow forth the precise theory which Kalynch had made his own. He held that good and ill fortune came alternately to every human being, with absolute certainty,—and in an ascending scale. For instance, if you could measure good or ill fortune by absolute numbers, he held that if an evil event, estimated at three, came upon you, this was to be followed by a favourable event estimated at four; and so on, in a recurring series. But what he most insisted upon, was the invariableness of the alternation of good and evil. This was his one idea, and he held to it grimly. He would not have lived with any one who had presumed to treat lightly this theory of his; and even the great Duke of Courland did not dare to jest at it in Kalynch’s presence. There was a time when Ivan as well as the other junior members of the Biron family, had believed in it implicitly.

Not even fond mothers love their children more than men their pet theories. Facts must be made somehow or other to conform to them. Perverse and seemingly intractable facts must be taught to know their proper places.

The events which Kalynch submitted to his

iron law of alternation, were to be equivalent events. A small piece of good fortune did not necessarily follow upon, or rather chime in with, a great disaster. Each set of events had its own proper increasing series.

Occasionally the Kalynch law seemed to break down—but not to Kalynch's own mind. The good man was unconscious of sophistry; but he had, nevertheless, a most ingenious way of dealing with refractory facts. Following a disaster, there would perversely come another disaster. This would have been felt to have been an untoward circumstance by any lukewarm believer in the Kalynch law—but not so to the discoverer of that law. He always found out that the second disaster was immediately and inevitably connected with that prior one which unthoughtful people imagined to be an isolated fact—that, in short, the two facts were one and indivisible. No commentator was ever more skilful in reconciling apparent inconsistencies, than was Kalynch in dealing with stupid facts that did their best to be contradictory. He had a simile, too, which was invariably brought out on such occasions. The world was much agitated about comets at that period. There was a kind of misfortune, Kalynch said, which was cometary. There was the nucleus and there was the tail; but ignorant observers did not always see that the nucleus and the tail constituted one body, and obeyed one law.

The man was very popular with all who knew him. When misfortune befel any one of them, it was delightful for him to have a friend who, sympathizing with him warmly (for Kalynch was a most kind-hearted man), was yet cheerful and even joyous over the sad event, for was it not

the herald of some signal piece of good fortune which was to follow ?

When the good fortune did come, the fortunate man laughed at his good friend Kalynch's consequent forebodings ; and then ventured, not, however, in his presence, to deride his theory.

Kalynch was a comforter at the time when most men most desire to be comforted. And, in prosperity, his friends could afford to listen with a smile to his prognostication of certain coming evil.

During his service in the Biron family, Kalynch had enjoyed large opportunities of observing the recurrence of good and evil fortune ; and he maintained that his theory, not that he called it a theory, had always proved true in that family. He, alone, of all the Duke of Courland's adherents, had not been dismayed by his master's downfall. He only waited for the corresponding favourable event which was to raise the Duke still higher in the world.

Kalynch had now taken Ivan's fortunes into his earnest consideration ; and, of course, things were happening just as they ought to happen, and must happen. Ivan had lately received a great place at Court, and was in high favour. Kalynch divined from Ivan's sad and downcast looks that he had now been unsuccessful in love—it was no secret that Ivan was devoted to Azra—and so, again, the course of human affairs obeyed its proper law. Kalynch was very cheerful—even sprightly—as the next piece of good fortune for his dear young master would evidently be of a generous and ample kind—what the ninth wave is to any of the preceding eight. Kalynch, as, from time to time, he furtively regarded Ivan, and saw how deep was his

dejection, felt assured of the proportionate grandeur of the coming event of prosperity.

Kalynch, in person, was a thin spare man, with a rigid but imposing set of features. He spoke deliberately, as a man should, whose words were as the words of fate. He had a trick of speech which had always afforded much amusement to his masters, for he could not restrain himself in it, even before them. After any one of his measured sentences, he was in the habit of saying in a lower tone, but still with distinctness, "Yes, yes certainly" or, to translate the Russian words more accurately, "Yes, yes, he has said it."

Thus poor Kalynch betrayed by open speech, that which most of us think, but do not say aloud.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER V.

THE LAPOUSCHIN CONSPIRACY—SOME OF ITS RESULTS.

It is a pretty device of some moral philosophers, and a very well-intended one, to maintain that the fates and fortunes of all men are equal, or at least, tend to equality. The ill-luck, however, that exists in the world, is not by any means divided equally amongst its inhabitants. Certainly, Ivan de Biron was a man marked out for a continuance of ill-fortune; and even those events which seemed to partake of the nature of prosperity for him, were nearly sure to be attended by very adverse circumstances. During the time that he was private secretary to the Duke of Courland (an appointment which he shared with an Englishman of the name of Shaw,) it seemed as if nothing could shake the Duke's power, and so depress the fortunes of his much envied private secretary. The Duke was a Sovereign Prince; and it was not to be expected that, even should any mishap occur to him as regarded his position of prime minister in Russia, he would

cease to be powerful in his Duchy of Courland. It happened otherwise, however, as we have seen; and Ivan had to share the exile of his master.

Recovering from that disaster, Ivan returned to St. Petersburg—there, again, to meet with misfortune, but to conquer it; and apparently to enter upon the high road of good fortune. He was now much courted in the society of that capital. It was nearly impossible for one in his position to remain unconnected with party. At that period the great drawback upon the development of civilization in Russia, was the deficiency of any large and powerful body of men who should not be immersed in party, or be free from the inevitable downfall which followed upon the revolution (it can be denoted by no lesser word), occasioned by any change of ministers.

It had previously been a great comfort to Ivan, that the House of Serbatoff was connected with that party of the State, under which Ivan was disposed to range himself. Their joint fortunes, however, were at this moment, though they did not know it, in great peril by reason of the imprudence of a few members of that party.

There was also a private cause of danger which they recked not of. They were unfortunate enough to have amongst their number the most beautiful woman in Russia, the Countess Lapouschin. This woman was especially hateful to, and hated by, the Empress. Scandal said that the chief cause of this enmity was the pre-eminent beauty of the Countess; but this probably, like many other scandalous assertions, was only partly true. It is a more than usually unjust accusation, that which is brought against women, of being jealous of other women's beauty, and unwilling

to recognize it. On the contrary, they are often more attracted by it even than men are. The stories told against the Sovereigns of Russia, and other great people at their Court, during that period, are to be received, as the Romans would have said, with many grains of salt; and much of what is said against them is as untrue as probably the tales of Suetonius are about the Roman Emperors.

There were other reasons than the one commonly assigned, which made the Czarina very bitter against the Countess Lapouschin.

Her singular beauty gave her great sway in Russian society; and, in that society, she was one of Elizabeth's most potent and most provoking enemies. The Empress knew well that her conduct was open to much censure, and, what was probably more galling, to much ridicule. It may fairly be conjectured that it was more on account of Madame Lapouschin's sharp tongue, than of her beautiful face, that the Empress Elizabeth was infuriated against her.

It happened that a great dinner-party was given at the house of the Lapouschins, or of some friend of theirs, at which party Ivan, after his return to St. Petersburg, was present. The conversation turned, as the conversation generally did turn, amongst these people, upon the faults and follies of the Empress; and "many shocking things," to use the words of a contemporary, were said against Her Majesty upon this occasion.

It will be recollected that a man of the name of Nariskoff had been one of the exiles at Pelem—the one who was mainly instrumental in discovering to his fellows the presence among them of the hated Duke of Courland. Obscure as he

was, he had not been forgotten in the general recall from exile, which had taken place immediately upon the seizure of the throne by Elizabeth. He was a guest at this dinner of the Lapouschins, for he had again become a favourite at the tables of the great. Previously to his exile, his wit, chiefly turned towards ill-nature, had somewhat wearied them; but now he had a set of new topics, which, closely relating to personalities of an amusing kind, were always welcome.

In exile, even the greatest personages, bereft of their ordinary sources of income, had made use of whatever special talent they possessed, to gain a livelihood for themselves, or to add to the common stock. This Prince had distinguished himself as a tailor: this Baron as a shoemaker: that Counsellor of State as a carpenter. Others had devoted themselves to the amusement of the miserable community in which they dwelt; and artistic talent of all kinds had been developed amongst them.

This afforded an excellent field for the wit and humour of Nariskoff; and his audience did not weary of hearing him describe, in the drollest terms, how the Prince stitched, and the Baron cobbled, and the Chevalier painted, and the Colonel sang. These narratives, moreover, had a special interest for a Russian audience, as the hearers could hardly help thinking how soon it might be their fate to exercise whatever talent was latent in them, for the purpose of gaining a livelihood in Siberia. The result was, that Nariskoff became more popular than ever—that is as far as popularity can be indicated by invitations to dinner.

At this dinner, Nariskoff greatly amused the

company by telling them of the proceedings of a certain Baron Neudorf, when in exile in Siberia. The Baron was known to most of them. In the society of St. Petersburg he had been considered a very dull man, and more than usually uninstructed. It pleased him, however, to set up as a schoolmaster at Pelem; and the malicious Nariskoff had often assisted at the school lessons. The wit's description of the way in which the Baron prepared for his teaching, and of his difficulty in answering the questions of the children, was exceedingly humorous.

One anecdote Nariskoff told, of rather a significant character. The Baron had asked what was the meaning of the word "exile." For a time there was no response from the pupils. At length one little girl stepped boldly forward to answer the question. She was the daughter of a travelling merchant. The Duke of Courland's suspicions, and the punishment that followed those suspicions, were not confined to the higher classes alone.

The child's answer was, "Black bread for me and Tatiana—only little bits—and not a drop of vodki for father."

Whatever facetiousness there might be in this anecdote, was of a very grim kind, and might have awakened some reflections tending to cautiousness of speech, if that joyous company had been at all disposed to entertain any such reflections.

Nariskoff did not fail on this occasion to chime in with the general tone of conversation; and his description of the Empress's proceedings, his imitation of Director-general Lestocq, and his representation of a Preobrajenski common soldier, swaggering at a café, were not the least

amusing features of this evening's dangerous conversation.

Ivan, as may be imagined, did not join in this clamour against his Imperial Mistress. On the contrary it pained him much. He did not, however, endeavour to stem the torrent of ill-nature and disloyal comment which then broke forth. He knew too well that some of the accusations were justly founded, and that any attempt at defence would only provoke recrimination. Once or twice he sought to change the current of the conversation, but his efforts were unsuccessful.

The whole of that conversation and the names of the persons present were soon afterwards reported to the Empress; and Ivan had, thenceforward, to endure much contumely from her, of which he could not divine the cause.

It was a great evil, not only for Russia, but for most European countries, at that period, that foreign ambassadors thought it part of their duty to meddle with the internal affairs of the countries to which they were accredited. A certain Marquis de Botta had lately been the ambassador from the Queen of Hungary to the Russian Court. He had, as it may be remembered, taken a very active part in warning the Duchess Regent of the danger to be apprehended from Lestocq's conspiracy, of which the Marquis had full cognizance.

This Marquis de Botta was now at Vienna; but he did not desist from his enmity to the Princess Elizabeth, now that she had gained the throne; and he was concerned in a conspiracy, in which it is said the Lapouschins were also engaged, together with Madame de Bestuchef, sister-in-law to the Chancellor, the Chamberlain

Lillianfeld, and several other persons of more or less consequence.

It is exceedingly doubtful whether this so-called conspiracy had proceeded much further than vague talk and vague aspirations. The world said, at that time, and nothing has since come to light to disprove the saying, that the Empress was but too glad to avail herself of any pretext for avenging herself upon the beautiful Countess Lapouschin. A man of the name of Berger, a cornet of cuirassiers, was one of the persons who had betrayed the traitorous conversation of these partisans to the Empress and her ministers. Berger was ordered to connect himself more closely with the conspirators. Upon further information that he gave, they were all arrested.

Elizabeth had now the conspirators in her power. If the conspiracy were not a full-fledged one, at any rate it was so far formed, or indicated, as to admit of the punishment for treason being awarded to all those who were nearly, or even remotely, connected with it. But Elizabeth was still 'Elizabeth the Clement.' Her fair rival now being completely at her mercy, the Czarina hesitated to condemn. As, however, it has been truly observed,

"There's some men of their bloody counsels boast,
As though the heart were difficult to harden."

And there are seldom wanting those who, in close proximity to the powerful, offer these bloody counsels, thinking that they will be sure to be acceptable, or fearing for themselves lest their political enemies, condemned to milder punishments, should ever be re-installed in favour again. Elizabeth's Prime Minister and

Chancellor, Bestuchef, urged upon his reluctant mistress to sign the warrant of condemnation of the Countess Lapouschin. The Czarina steadily refused.

A mode of influence was then brought to bear upon her which the astute Chancellor knew would have great effect. The Empress, as it has previously been shown in this narrative, was a very dutiful daughter of her Church. A Court preacher, whose name, unhappily, cannot be devoted to infamy, for it is unknown, delivered an eloquent and vehement sermon in the presence of the Czarina, which was divided into the two following theses.

The first was, on the obedience and fidelity due to Sovereigns, and further of the respect due to their sacred persons. The second dwelt upon the duty of sovereigns to punish, without regard of persons, those who dared to attempt anything against their lives, their honour (herein was the Countess most guilty), or their prerogative.

The effect of this eloquent discourse upon Elizabeth was visible to all those who were present on this occasion. No sooner had she withdrawn to her private apartments, than it was pressed upon her "that the intention of God himself was that she should punish these guilty persons." The warrant for their condemnation was then placed before her—and she signed it.

Madam Lapouschin was condemned to have her tongue cut out; and she died from the effect of this brutal mutilation.

After this execution had taken place, an undying remorse seized upon the heart of Elizabeth. It was then that she finally resolved never to sign any death warrant. She retained her Chan-

cellor in power. She knew that he was the ablest minister whose services she could command. But she reproached him, as perhaps our own Elizabeth did not fail to reproach those of her ministers, who, on a like occasion, had urged these bloody counsels upon a reluctant mistress; and the Russian Elizabeth's memorable words were these: "You have deceived me a hundred times," she said to her Chancellor, "You have employed God and the Devil to surprise my signature; you will never deceive me again. My successors, stronger than I am, will know how to punish you some day as you deserve."

It may well be imagined that if Elizabeth's generous reluctance to condemn the Countess (whom, now pitying, she cared for most) had been thus overcome, how little difficulty there must have been in obtaining her signature for the condemnation of the minor conspirators, in whose fate the readers of this narrative are more immediately interested.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER VI.

AZRA'S RETURN TO ST. PETERSBURG—IVAN'S ARREST AND EXILE.

AZRA, or as perhaps she should be called, Signora Hurtaldi, had previously returned to St. Petersburg. The offers made by the Director of the Opera to procure that return had been most liberal. Their liberality, however, was not the cause which induced the Signora to accede to his proposal, for she was very indifferent to the pecuniary rewards for the exercise of her talent. A lingering desire to see Ivan again had more weight with her. There was also a great pleasure in store for her, as she thought, in having to produce before her old and best-loved audience, the same opera in which she had been so successful in Paris—a success which had reached the ears of all the connoisseurs at St. Petersburg.

Ivan did not fail to renew his companionship with Azra, though he still feared to speak, even

in the most guarded manner, of the subject that was nearest his heart.

Azra had taken upon herself much of the management and preparation which were necessary to place with full effect the new opera upon the Russian stage. She was a dictatress in all matters that related to the dress, scenery, and general arrangements for this opera, respecting which she alone had Parisian experience. Previously to the first representation, she passed most of her time at the Opera-house, where her presence was constantly needed to give the requisite directions. Ivan, when he wished to see her, had to seek for her there. The original cause of difference between them still existed. It was rarely, if ever, directly alluded to; but each of them was fully aware of its existence, and that no change had taken place in the mind of the other respecting it. He was anxious to withdraw her from theatrical life: she was determined to remain.

The relations between Azra and Count Gluck were not known to any one, not even to Ivan; but it may be conjectured that their intimacy had not proceeded further, and that more observation of the Count's character had compelled Azra to look upon his suit less and less favourably. In truth, if there was anybody in the world whom the Prima Donna really liked, it was her old friend Ivan. But for him there certainly was not that convincing love, or liking, which would induce her to be materially swayed by him, and to give up the delight of her life, her theatrical career, to please her lover.

It was on the day before the representation of the new Opera, that Ivan, in the afternoon, came

to the Opera-house, and sought an interview with Azra. He had just been suddenly dismissed from the Household of Elizabeth, and had been in much perplexity as to the course of life he should now adopt. Finally he had almost determined to return to Courland, where he had numerous connections, and where the influence of his former master, the Duke of Courland, might be most serviceable to him. With the Duke, who, though he was not allowed to return to Court, had not been formally dispossessed of his sovereignty over Courland, Ivan was still in friendly relation, and had indeed been the means of communication between His Highness and his partisans at St. Petersburg. Ivan resolved that now, or never, he must ascertain whether Azra would consent to marry him, and would, with him, enter upon the new life which he proposed to live in Courland.

He found her very busy, and not in the most amiable of moods, for, as mostly happens in such cases, there were many things which had gone wrong; and much that she had expected to complete, was not completed. Still she received him kindly, and apologized for the confusion in the midst of which he found her.

"I am so sorry, Ivan," she said (the familiar use of his christian name had recommenced at St. Petersburg), "to hear that you are no longer in the Household; but no doubt it is only a momentary caprice of the Empress's, and she will give you some higher office, something more worthy of you."

"You do not know her, Azra. Some one has poisoned her mind against me. I have seen it and felt it for some time. All is over for me

in Russia. I am determined to return to Courland; and gladly should I return if—”

“If what, Ivan? Is there anything that I can do?”

“Yes: there is everything that you can do. You can come with me.”

Azra grew pale as he said these words. “What! leave the opera!” she exclaimed, “leave St. Petersburg now! There is no opera in Courland.”

“Why should there be? What should my wife want with operas?”

“No, Ivan: I could not, I really could not: you do not know what you ask of me.”

“I do know: I only ask what any woman who loved me, would at once grant. But you love me not, Azra. This painted mimicry of passion fills your heart.”

Here they were interrupted by the leader of the orchestra entering hastily, and requesting that Azra would come and listen to the chorus in the second Act, which was being “abominably done”—“abominably” repeated the little man, “and you must come and help me drill them, Signora.” Azra promised to come, and the man left the room.

It is hardly to be told with what passion—passion aided by despair—Ivan then pressed his suit. “Had she not once loved him? Had she not then been everything to him?”

Azra could have made an unpleasant answer to this question; but the generous girl forebore to do so. She owned that she liked him better than anybody else; but she could not do what he wished her to do. That would be too great a sacrifice for him as well as for her.

Ivan grew indignant; and finally placed all his hopes and wishes upon a single and definite answer—Yes, or No.

Azra faintly uttered the fatal negative.

Again the leader of the orchestra made his appearance, and claimed her presence at the rehearsal. Ivan dejectedly followed her from the green-room to the stage. Here there were four persons who, as it appeared, were not at all required for stage business. They were a Lieutenant of Cuirassiers, accompanied by three privates of his regiment. No sooner did the Lieutenant see Ivan, than, going towards him, he touched him on the shoulder, demanded his sword in the Czarina's name, and told him that he was their prisoner.

Brief was the parting between Ivan and Azra; and apparently not more than that of ordinary friends, though he held her hand for some short time in his, and looked with sad questioning into her eyes. But these she cast down; though she strove to return his fond pressure with a fondness equal to his own. And thus they parted.

Ivan was at first conveyed to Schlüsselberg, where he had to undergo a private judicial examination. It was clearly brought in evidence against him that he had been present at the dinners of the Lapquschins and their friends. His complicity in the plot against the Empress was inferred; certainly it could not have been proved; and the result was, that he was condemned again to exile in Siberia.

The representation of the new Opera was put off for some days on account of the indisposition of the Prima Donna. Some said that the arrangements for the Opera were not ready, and

that this was the cause of the delay. This was not true ; but when the first representation did take place, Azra's grief for Ivan's misfortune, and for their sad and sorry parting, though that grief was deep and real, did not prevent her from making those exertions which sufficed to ensure as great a triumph for her at St. Petersburg as that which she had enjoyed at Paris.

BOOK VI

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER I.

THE JOURNEY TO SIBERIA—IVAN DE BIRON AND NARISKOFF IN THE FOREST OF PELEM.

THE journey to Siberia, even when it is a traveller and not an exile who journeys, is anything but joyous. The boundless plains, the sombre grey colouring, the few birch trees scattered here and there, in such disproportion to the vastness of the surrounding scenery as to justify Robert Hall's celebrated saying, on contemplating a similar region, that when a tree did appear, "it was only nature holding up a signal of distress,"—render the journey, even to the most buoyant mind, a gloomy and a mournful one.

The traveller who, for the first time, comes from a champaign to a mountainous region, or from a land of hills and dales to a country of dead level, is, no doubt, somewhat astonished and bewildered. But, in their way to Siberia, there is that which affects most men more than any change in the mere form of country from

that which they have been accustomed to—namely the absence of the signs of definite possession. In countries that are more civilized and more peopled, these signs of possession, which are visible even in very barren and in very lofty regions, give a feeling of welcome to the traveller, tell him of the conquests made by man, and indicate somewhat of peace, order, and security.

The limitless plain, on the contrary, when undivided by landmarks, creates a sense of the feebleness of man when compared with the vastness of the possession which he may have entered upon, but cannot be said to have subdued.

The regretful feelings, however, of the exile, the severity of the discipline by which he is driven along, and his many physical discomforts, leave him neither time nor heart to note much the scenery through which he is hurried, and which, perhaps, does not serve more than to form a gloomy and unpropitious background to his nearer and more pressing miseries.

Again the scene of action is Siberia. Again the time of the year is spring—that season, in all but the most favoured climes, the most repulsive,—and, in Siberia, absolutely hideous.

It was a still evening, with the usual damp mist pervading everywhere, when two men were walking in a glade that went for some miles through the forest neighbouring to Pelem. They were both well-known personages in this story, though it would have been doubtful whether those, who had known the younger of these men in former days, would, at first sight, have recognized him now. His countenance was still that of a young man; but it had acquired some of the marks and signs which belong

to middle life, if not to old age. The forehead was indented with those lines which are made by care and trouble, even more than by thought, upon that plastic material, the human face. Moreover the ends of the hair had begun to change colour; and it might be foreseen that, unless this change should be arrested by a change of mind, this young man would, in a few years, be prematurely grey.

His companion was unaltered as regards any marks signifying age, but a certain expression of sourness sat upon the face that had not been there before: his smile was far less pleasing even than it had been formerly; and it seemed as if the wit had become a confirmed cynic.

The companionship of these two men did not appear likely, from what is known of them, to be a close and enduring one. Any person who knew them both, would not have prophesied that they would have become constant allies and companions, for there was a frankness in the countenance of the younger man, which, if physiognomy can be relied upon, could not well meet with any response from the other.

Yet there was a bond of friendliness and companionship of a very enduring character. The young man was an unhappy man, who had begun to take very gloomy views of human life. Nothing is more distasteful to such a man than the company of the hopeful and the cheerful. Their bright hopes and their gay speech are almost insults to him, or so he deems them. But he is somewhat comforted when he finds that any other person's views are still darker than his own. Indeed, his views may become comparatively bright by contrast. The great

artists know and prove this. It is not until all the colours are in the picture, that you can tell what any colour may seem to be, for this 'seeming' depends upon the surrounding tints.

This appreciation of a gloomier nature than his own, was the motive that led the younger man to cultivate the friendship of the elder one. He, on the other hand, studied to make himself agreeable to his young friend from a very different reason. Banishment to Siberia was not so severe under the rule of the Empress Elizabeth as it had been under former sovereigns, and, especially, during the time when the Duke of Courland was prime minister of Russia. The young man was, for Siberia, rich—that is, a small sum was allowed daily for his sustenance; whereas, the other was without a kopeck. Now, luxuries at St. Petersburg or Moscow—something more than the barest necessities of life at Pelem—were what the elder man most distinctly coveted, and would have sought for at any sacrifice. He, therefore, in general, adapted his talk to the humour of his companion, and sometimes even went extravagantly beyond it, seeing that this was the best means of securing the other's friendship, and all the good things that followed therefrom.

The elder man was Nariskoff: his companion was Ivan de Biron.

The forests in Siberia swarm with wild and fierce animals, not of the grander but of the lower kind; such as wolves, foxes, martens, wild-cats, and the like.

The two friends were apparently talking of one of these creatures, for which they evidently entertained a great aversion.

"So fierce when provoked!" said Nariskoff.

"Yes," said Ivan.

"Such a revengeful creature!"

"Hardly great enough for revenge," replied Ivan.

"So cruel to its own species," said Nariskoff.

"So deceitful," replied his companion.

"Sees no further than its own narrow lair, and not much in that," exclaimed the elder man.

"So false—so false," replied the younger.

"Feline!" exclaimed Nariskoff.

"So fickle—lures you on, and then—"

"So taken by mere finery. Diamonds are her divinities."

The listener would now have known that the creature these two men were talking of, was not any wild animal of the woods but a woman.

Now all this was very false talk on Nariskoff's part. He was a devoted admirer of women. It was they who, in his fallen fortunes, had been most kind to him: and he was not unmindful of this fact.

There is a just saying, or at least a plausible one, that it is bad men who speak ill of women. Now Nariskoff was not a bad man, but merely one whose nature was not strong enough to withstand the usual effect of misfortune upon the character; and, for the moment, he merely said these spiteful things in compliance with the morbid humour of his companion.

But with Ivan, alas! it was otherwise. A fine, noble, trustful nature had been deeply affected by the evil which had befallen it. We speak of ruin chiefly as applied to physical matters and to outward fortune; but there may be such things as ruined natures; and each of

these men afforded an example of the danger of that sad possibility.

"They have uniformly been the cause of misery and misfortune to me," said Ivan, resuming the conversation. "The weak and pliable Duchess Regent, with her weak and indolent favourite, Juliana de Mengden—the voluptuous and shallow-hearted Elizabeth, under whose tyranny we suffer—that wonderful prima donna, the Signora Hurtaldi (she might have kept her pretty gypsy name, Azra)—that false, hard, and proud Princess Marie Andréevna:—these women, one and all of them, have been a curse to me."

Nariskoff thought to himself, but did not give voice to the thought "He could not have been more unfortunate with women, even if he had been a man of genius."

"Do you know where we are, Nariskoff? No: how should you know! It is a part of the forest which is still resonant with woman's falsehood."

"You see that trunk of a tree? It has remained here while its kindred logs have been carried away. The thing is wicked—is accursed. Here a false girl, has, ere this, allowed a true and loving youth to sit beside her: and has listened to his tale of love with all due maidenly reserve, but still with no unwilling ears, for then, clad in peasant dress, she held herself not so much above him. But diamonds! diamonds! as you said, Nariskoff; those bright pebbles make the difference—they have hearts of diamonds, I believe. Let us proceed with the story of the youth and maiden. They interchanged vows of constancy."

"A scholar such as you, De Biron, having read your Horace and all about him and his Lydia, then talking of 'vows of constancy'! a

phrase at best of travelling pedlars, picked up from their peasant customers. The thing is unknown to decent people brought up in Petersburg and Moscow."

"Ah! well," resumed Ivan, "I will not say what happened besides, but a soft cheek may be no indication of a loving heart. Yes, it was here, she vowed she would be mine. But the air is different in St. Petersburg from that in Siberia. Though nipping here (Ivan shuddered as he spoke) it has some sense of truthfulness in it, while at St. Petersburg, if a true man were to speak truly, the shocked atmosphere would not allow the truthful words to be conveyed without some damning perversion into falsehood. You should have seen her airs of patronage, when we met in the Palace. She and her courtly father are now, I doubt not, basking in imperial sunshine."

"You are fond of walking in this forest, De Biron," said Nariskoff: "you generally contrive that we should turn in this direction; and I am such an easy-going fellow that I am always willing to take the road my companions wish to travel."

"I love it, and I hate it, Nariskoff."

"You are mostly wrapt in a sublime reverie when you come hither—not a very bright companion! I don't think you see much of what is going on around you here."

"What should I see?" said Ivan. "I know the trees by heart. They are only less odious to me than the bare, barren, dreary plain with its morasses, on the other side of the town."

"What a loss it is!" replied Nariskoff, "not to have a philosophic mind. I see numberless trans-

actions in the forest which give me ample food for contemplation. Did you notice what I was doing a few minutes ago, near the great spruce tree, while you were leaning against it, and looking up into vacancy?"

"No:" replied Ivan, in an indifferent tone.

"Well, it was a most unphilosophic employment. I was endeavouring to prevent one of the myriad murders which are always being perpetrated in this peaceful abode of bliss, this forest. An idiotic reptile, a black thing, with many joints and convolutions, was taking his evening walk—if single, thinking of his wayward mistress; if married, thinking of his many family cares; or, if he had any germ of worldly wisdom, scheming how he should provide himself with supper. And he had the folly to walk near an ant's nest. Out they came upon him, as prompt to their work as Kirgish robbers. But these insects are certainly the most sensible creatures in the world. How different from men! The ants saw directly that four of their number would be sufficient to do the business; and the others turned back in search of other prey. Now men never know how to apportion their numbers to their work."

"What is it they do know?" said Ivan.

"Oh, two or three things," replied Nariskoff.

"The truth is; man is very well in his way: the world is very well in its way: only man is not quite equal to the position which he holds in it. Whether he ever will be, is a question."

"Well, well," said Ivan, somewhat peevishly, "but what about the other insects you saw?"

"People don't understand me," continued

Nariskoff: "there is a great deal of chivalry in my composition. Ignoring the high probability that the other ants would attack me, as indeed they did, I rushed to the rescue of my wriggling, black friend, though, as a general rule, I dislike fools, and do not much care to aid them. But I could do nothing for him, without committing murder, myself. When I brushed off one of his enemies, the others stuck to him all the same, sucking out his life-blood. By the time I had brushed another off, the vigorous little wretch, whom I had first displaced, returned to the charge. Eventually, poor little blackie and myself became exhausted by our efforts; and I was obliged to leave him to his fate. You saw nothing of this heroic struggle."

"Not much:" said Ivan.

"If you looked more about you," rejoined Nariskoff, "you would be a wiser and perhaps a happier man. Don't you see that we are all made to prey and to be preyed upon? Man is the noblest creature in creation: at least he always says so in his books; and, as the other creatures have had the good sense to conceal their talents for reading and writing, they never care to contradict him. Now, how much too happy men would be, and how unfairly the world would be arranged, if there were no such creatures as women to torment those who torment all the other created beings.

"It's very stupid of you not to understand these things, and to take your ill-fortune, as you call it, so much to heart. Why, I myself,—but that's no matter—it was only the old story."

"Yes; old enough no doubt," exclaimed Ivan. "When there were but ten women in the world

and seven men, there were ten deceivers on the earth and seven dupes."

The words of the young man were so bitter and his gestures so fierce, that Nariskoff, not much accustomed to indulge in feelings of pity, felt for him, and even changed the tone of his rejoinders. He spoke, as a man of the world, of what he was pleased to call the love of young bears before they can walk upright on their hind legs; made excuses both for young men and young women, as regards their delusions in the early spring of life; and, warming with his subject, for the man could be eloquent as well as cynical, he did his best to comfort Ivan. He said that there was a future still before him; that he would yet find his true love, who would be neither princess, nor player: and he drew a droll picture of Ivan as a father of a large family, all of whom would delight in uncle Nariskoff, and climb upon his knees to hear his wondrous stories about the bears and wolves of the Siberian forests.

Ivan looked at his friend in astonishment. He was not altogether displeased with this picture, and he was certainly amused at its being depicted by Nariskoff, who had never, hitherto, indulged in such an outburst of gracious fancy.

"And where is this paragon to come from? A spirit of the wood, I suppose! So fierce when provoked, so revengeful, so cruel to its own species, so purblind except in its own small circle, so feline, as a certain wise friend of mine not long ago informed me, and yet—perfection! And this paragon is to fall in love with a wretched exile."

"I did not say, De Biron, that she was to be

perfection. Nobody can accuse me of ever attributing perfection to man or woman. But I will tell you something—something which is worth a great deal of money, and of which I could make good barter at St. Petersburg. They talk of first love. Poets and poetasters rave about it. They would have you believe that it is something divine, something which can never be renewed, something which gods and goddesses smile upon benignly. It is all stuff. How should it be otherwise?"

Here he paused for a minute or two, and Ivan thought he had ended. Meanwhile, Nariskoff had sat down upon that felled tree of which Ivan had spoken. And he sat, where she had sat. Ivan gently lifted him up. Nariskoff understood it all; and, with difficulty repressed a smile. Then he said: "This was my valuable saying. Talk as they may about first love being the lasting one! It is the last love that lasts, if any."

The friends walked on in silence to the town; and Ivan, when he reached his hut, being absorbed in thought, failed to invite Nariskoff, as had been his wont, to enter with him, and share his evening meal.

Nariskoff said to himself, as he turned homeward, "This comes of doing a good-natured thing, but I will not again commit the same error."

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE SERBATOFFS AT PELEM— NARISKOFF'S DESIGN.

IVAN imagined that Pelem had been chosen as his place of exile for some special reason ; and he had puzzled himself in thinking over the question whether this choice was a mark of favour, or the contrary. It was, however, only an instance of the hap-hazard way in which official matters are sometimes settled in despotic countries, and even, occasionally, under constitutional governments.

The order for his exile had come from the minister without any directions as to the place of exile. A junior clerk had said to another junior in the office : " Where is the poor devil to go to ? There is no place named."

" Where was he the last time ? " replied the other.

They looked ; and found that it was Pelem.

" Let's send him there," said the first speaker. " I dare say he would like it best. You remem-

ber him in the Duke's time. He often came to the office, and he did not swagger about so much as the other private Secretaries. He had always a good word for a fellow. Enter him for the next batch to Pelem. I say! his barony hasn't done him much good, has it?"

This was the amount of care and thought which had been given to determine Ivan's place of exile, and, to discover which, he might long have puzzled his brains before arriving at the real solution.

Ivan was entirely wrong, when, in his last conversation with Nariskoff, he had pictured the Serbatoffs as revelling in imperial favour. They were, unhappily for them, connected with one or two of the principal persons concerned in the Lapouschin conspiracy. They had even been present at some of the dinners given by the Lapouschins, or their friends; and the conversation which then took place had been reported, if not accurately, at any rate with no desire to render less offensive the terms in which the conduct and character of the Czarina had been commented upon by the guests. It may be imagined how distressing to Prince Serbatoff was any talk defaming the Empress, or indeed any persons in high authority. Great were the efforts which he made to divert the conversation into less dangerous channels; and he had, latterly, avoided accepting any invitations to houses where he found that this kind of talk was prevalent. His caution, however, came too late: he was already compromised—compromised! a word of horror to that veteran courtier. Shortly after the time when Ivan had been dismissed from the household, and

condemned to exile, the Serbatoffs were also arrested and similarly condemned.

They had, at first, been sent to Tobolsk; but the Princess Marie, or her friends, had still sufficient interest with some of the minor functionaries of government, to contrive, that according to her wish, the family should be removed to Pelem; and, at the very time when Ivan was declaiming against them, they had arrived at their place of destination.

The Princess did not know that Ivan was there, nor did she even know that he was exiled. These condemnations came so suddenly, and were so swiftly executed, that even an exile's intimate friends might not, for some time, know anything about the calamity which had befallen him. And there was now no longer any intimacy between the Serbatoffs and Ivan de Biron.

The associations which the Princess had with the town and neighbourhood of Pelem, could not have been very painful, or, if painful, were still very dear to her; otherwise she would hardly have made the effort, which she did, to get their place of residence changed from Tobolsk to Pelem. The Prince was quite indifferent as regards the matter. All places, but where the Court was, were equally distasteful and odious to him. He was one of those men, not uncommonly found in the higher classes of all countries, and notably in our own, who, from their earliest years, having been accustomed to the management of great affairs, acquire an almost passionate love for business, and can in no other way employ their eager, active minds.

The Prince, in his former term of exile, neither tailored, nor cobbled, nor taught at schools; nor, though he thought himself a skilful amateur, did

he ever assist at the musical entertainments of the exiles. The phrase, so often used in describing the fate of men situated as he was, really did apply to him. "He languished in exile." But for the loving care of his daughter, and for the love he bore to her, he might soon have died from sheer incapacity to take any interest in life.

One unpleasant topic was sometimes discussed between the father and the daughter. She might have married into the Bestuchef family. "We should all have been saved, then," he would exclaim. Against this excellent arrangement there was only the foolish reason on her part that she did not like the particular Bestuchef in question.

"I am sure I never loved your mother before we married, and you know how happy we were," he would reply. "Ah! the Dolgorouckis (the late Princess was a Dolgoroucki) were everything then."

Pelem had, in the course of the last few years, increased in size and importance. A new branch of trade had been established there, that of furs of the coarser kind; and there were now some small houses of a better class than the log huts which had been occupied by the exiles in former days. The Serbatoffs had one of these small houses allotted to them.

The society of the town, too, had improved. Field Marshal Münnich was there, occupying the house of his old enemy, the Duke of Courland. This great general was not to be subdued by adversity. He taught a school: he built a church: he was, in fact, one of those men who bring with them life and animation wherever they go, and who maintain a certain cheerfulness under whatever adverse circumstances they may be placed.

Ivan remained in ignorance that the Serbatoffs were his companions in misfortune, and that their dwelling was not more than a stone's throw from his own log hut—the one, by the way, which the Serbatoffs had inhabited previously, and which Ivan had contrived to gain for himself, giving up in exchange one of the smaller houses which had been assigned to him. The friendly feeling of the junior clerk had not exhausted itself in naming a place of exile for Ivan which he thought would be preferred by him; but had subsequently ensured an especially favourable treatment for him at this place of exile.

And here it may be remarked, that the quality which had gained for Ivan much favour from this junior clerk, was one which sometimes injured his repute. The world is slow to believe in the truthfulness of very kind people, and indeed, mostly goes further than that, and is wont to suspect untruthfulness in them. This can hardly ever be otherwise, for most persons are prone to assign motives to any action they contemplate; and those motives must be such as, in some measure, accord with their own feelings or experience. When, therefore, a very kind-hearted man goes beyond the average kindness of other persons, in his conduct or behaviour, the majority of men, not being able to imagine a degree of kindness which is foreign to their own natures and experience, must invent a motive for such conduct or behaviour, other than mere kindliness.

Ivan, who, from his earliest years, had devoted himself to the doing of kindly actions, for which he possessed great opportunity when he was the Duke of Courland's Secretary, had, amongst undiscerning people, the reputation of not having been altogether a true man. It was a very self-

seeking age; the Court of Russia afforded a field for very sinister actions and designs; and Ivan underwent the danger, which is always experienced by one who is morally in advance of the people, amongst whom his lot is thrown—a danger fully equal to that of being intellectually in advance of those with whom it is a man's fate to live.

It was not surprising that Ivan remained ignorant for some time of the presence at Pelem of the Serbatoff family. He had become a great student. Originally having received what was thought a good education for those days, he had greatly strengthened that education during his former exile, when he was in the same house with his master the Duke of Courland.

The means for doing so were afforded to him in this way. The Duke's judicial examination at Schlüsselberg, previously to his exile at Pelem, had been far less unfavourable to him than his enemies had expected. He had, moreover, written a letter to the late Duchess Regent, which could hardly be read, even by an enemy, without eliciting some admiration for the Duke's character, and some sympathy for his hard fate. It was a dignified and noble letter. In it, the Duke declared that he wanted nothing for himself, no alleviation of his own sufferings, but merely that the Duchess Regent should not punish those friends and relations of his who were totally guiltless of offence to her.

Certain it is the Duke's conduct, on his downfall, won so much favour with the Duchess Regent as to cause some solace to be provided for him in his exile. His books were sent to him. It may be doubted whether the moody, miserable man derived much comfort from these

books, or whether he even looked into them; but Ivan profited by them, and was encouraged by the Duke to prosecute his studies. Now, in Ivan's second time of exile, ardent study was his only comfort, and the great satirists were his favourite authors. He was never weary of reading Horace, Rabelais, Molière and Montaigne.

With none of the other exiles, but Nariskoff, had Ivan made any acquaintance: and consequently he was not likely to hear from them of the addition that had been made to their number.

Twenty-four hours had not passed after the arrival of Prince Serbatoff and his motherless daughter (the Princess Serbatoff had died at St. Petersburg,) before the busy, prying Nariskoff was aware of that arrival. A great scheme entered into his head—a scheme combining that good nature of his early days when he was loving to his serfs, with the cynical superstructure which he had allowed to rise upon, and, for the most part, to crush, his earlier hopes and aspirations.

He would ascertain whether the Princess was this cruel, vain, proud woman that Ivan depicted her to be; and whether there was any of that affection for the young man still remaining in her breast, which he had described (in most exaggerated terms, as Nariskoff suspected) as having existed in former days. What especially delighted Nariskoff in his plan, and what he anticipated would be endless food for satirical enjoyment, was that he would be able to play upon the vanity of both of them, making them believe that each was almost dying with love for the other.

Nariskoff rubbed his hands with delight when he thought of this, and imagined how he should bring it about.

"The fools, the fools!" he exclaimed to himself. "They talk of love, but omit the little word that should always go before it—'self.' Let me see, I shall be fifty-seven my next birthday, and I am not exactly the man whom young ladies fall in love with. Yet if there were but another amiable Nariskoff to plead my cause with any young maiden, telling her that I was dying for love of her, I should succeed, I know I should. No satirists—not Ivan's Horaces, Molières, or Montaignes—have ever sounded the deep sea of human vanity; or, if they sounded it, did not read off their soundings to the world. They dare not do so. No man would believe them if they did: none at least if we except the two or three wise men of their time; and there are few Nariskoffs, I trow, besides the one in Russia, in this generation."

Thus Nariskoff reasoned. For some days he was almost as moody as Ivan himself, deeply meditating his great project, and contriving that Ivan should, for the present, be kept in ignorance of the arrival of the Serbatoffs, until he, Nariskoff, had matured his plan, and commenced its execution.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER III.

NARISKOFF MEETS THE PRINCESS MARIE.

It was not long before Nariskoff found the opportunity he sought for. He had haunted the wood adjoining Pelem at all hours of the day; and it was towards the evening of the ninth day after the Princess Marie's arrival, that he was fortunate enough to meet her walking in that cleared pathway in the forest which led towards the town. She was not alone, being followed by a white dog marked here and there with black spots about the head, of the bull-terrier species—that most affectionate and most intelligent of the canine race, as those affirm it to be who understand its very expressive, though as some think, very uncomely countenance. Having been brought from England, it had received the name of Ingel.

Nariskoff at once accosted the Princess.

“I almost wonder to find you, Princess, walking here alone. Are you not afraid?”

"No, not with Ingel at my side. It would be but faint praise to say that he is a truer friend than most men; but he is a truer friend than most dogs; and that is, indeed, saying something worth saying in his favour."

Meanwhile Ingel, finding himself the subject of conversation, looked up at Nariskoff and made those expressive winkings of the eyes, and movements of the nose which, in that race of dogs, indicate somewhat of doubt, and somewhat of dislike. Nariskoff bent down to pat the animal, but this indication of friendship was only received by a threatening growl, upon which Nariskoff ceased to make any further demonstrations of friendly regard.

"But why are *you* here, Nariskoff? I should not have thought that they would have cared to rid themselves of you, though I doubt not you were much more guilty than ourselves, with that provoking tongue of yours, which must run on in censure, even when our Empress is the subject of the conversation."

It may here be remarked that Nariskoff, notwithstanding the little aid or service he had rendered to the Princess's family when they were last in exile, was somewhat of a favourite of hers. Like many other persons of a satirical turn, she was not sorry to listen to the satire which she would not condescend, herself, to utter.

She resumed the conversation, by asking him whether he had had any other punishment to undergo, thus delicately referring to the knout. He answered, "No." She then spoke in detail, and with much bitterness, of the cruelty that had been exercised upon the Countess Lapouschin, whereupon he said, "Who is imprudent now, Princess?"

"I can trust you, Nariskoff. You would not harm us, though I cannot say that the last time we were in this horrid place, you proved yourself a faithful friend."

"A starving man, Princess, has little time for friendship. Friendship is a luxury. The full-fed can afford to be friendly. But is there anything I can do now?"

"Nothing, Nariskoff. It must be said for Elizabeth that she is not so barbarous as Biron was; and we have enough to eat and drink and sufficient fuel to warm our wretched selves with, though, for my part, I am not sure whether this is any kindness to us."

Nariskoff thought that there was now a good opportunity for bringing about some talk upon the subject he had in view; and he replied.

"You did not then, Princess, find the labour so severe last time? Doubtless it was lightened by companionship? I think there used to be a young man—"

"Yes, several persons were good enough last time to aid me in what I could do for my poor father and mother. I wish I could remember, Nariskoff, that you had been one of them."

After this rebuff, to which Nariskoff could make no reply, they walked on in silence for some little time, until, on the return towards the town, they came to that spot which has so often been mentioned in this story—the seat on which the lovers in former days had sat.

The Princess remained standing here for some minutes, though Nariskoff beckoned to her to take the seat near to the tree, which, as he remarked, seemed to have been made by some benevolent person, happily combining art with nature.

The Princess sat down : whereupon Nariskoff observed that there were some persons, though, who evidently thought that there was danger in sitting there.

"The other day," said he, "I was walking with a young man,—not so very young though,—for there are some of those stupid grey hairs on his head as on mine, which give one most unwelcome hints—"

"Well, but about the young old man, Nariskoff? What did he do to you?"

"He took me by the shoulders in the rudest manner, lifted me up, and said I must not sit there. He is a very wild young man—half-crazed, I think,—always talking of the injuries which women have done him—empresses and actresses and princesses. You know that I have some little gift of speech ; but I can make nothing of him. He will not listen to me when I endeavour to persuade him that women are the crown of creation, — consolers, comforters, sympathizers—their companionship the one joy for man, overcoming all his sorrows ; and that, at the bottom of Pandora's casket, it was not Hope, as those hard ancients say, but woman's love that was lying there, in itself sufficient to control and conquer all forms of human misery and suffering."

The Princess looked fixedly and inquiringly at Nariskoff while he was uttering this tirade ; but his impassive countenance did not betray any particular or private interest in the subject. He continued :

"You must have seen him. He was here when we were last here, Princess. Some people go to Paris, some to Vienna, more than once in their life-time. We choose Pelem ; do we

not? A lovely, luxuriant spot! What charming colours the morasses afford for artists! You were, yourself, no mean amateur, Princess, if I recollect rightly. Well, but about this young man, this woman-hater: he was a Secretary of Courland's. If I recollect rightly, you gave him letters home. He was recalled, you know, before we were. A Baron now, Baron Ivan de Biron."

The Princess concealed her emotion by the expression of great astonishment. "What, is he here? I thought he was in high favour with the Empress."

"No," replied Nariskoff; "the young man must have told the truth on some occasion. It is difficult to break oneself of that bad habit. I should not have been with you in this wood, Princess, but for my truthful nature. The Baron occupies that splendid residence which was once graced by your fair presence. I sometimes honour him by my good company. But he is a dull dog. He has only one subject to talk about, and no novelty in that. The Empress is not the only lady he rails at. You should have heard his abuse at this very spot of all your faithless, wicked sex."

"Then Azra, I mean Madame Hurtaldi the great actress, is not gracious to him," she replied; "for it was said that he was her devoted lover. Such at least was common report. I've often seen him at St. Petersburg; and he was very kind to my father when we were last here."

"You will not see much of him now, Princess, for he is always at his books. The young man threatens to become a dull pedant. If it were not a cruel thing to say, I am so glad that you

are here, for now I shall have somebody to talk to. He is so wearisome. And then, as you may imagine, we are inclined to quarrel. What can one say to a fellow who has only got to tell one that women are false, cold-hearted, perverse, sly, treacherous, I know not what. You know how differently I think, Princess. The last time we were here, I am sure I thought he was talking of some wild animal of the woods; but it proved to be only a woman that was in his thoughts."

"A woman?" said the Princess.

"No: all women. But there was one who was worse than the rest. Some peasant girl whom he had known here. The Baron's loves are not of an exalted kind. All other women, bad as they are, were good when compared with her. She was the falsest of the false. I suppose she loved some other youth when he went away."

"Never!" exclaimed the Princess.

"You knew her then?" said Nariskoff.

"No," replied the Princess. "I only speak for the honour of our sex. Men lay their falseness upon us; and what they call our falseness is but a faint reflection of their own."

"I wish you had been here the other day, Princess. I should then have had an ally; and should have been happy to fight under your banner."

The Princess was silent for a minute, meditating what response she should make. It was infinitely vexatious to her to think that this talkative, satirical man knew, perhaps, more than he pretended to know about the former relations between Ivan and herself. She recollected, as if it had been yesterday, how their

parting at Pelem had been suddenly broken off by the appearance of Nariskoff and his attendant fool, Matchka, in the street. To plead anything like ignorance of Ivan, or, indeed, to pretend that her relations with him had been otherwise than most friendly, would only arouse, or deepen, this man's suspicions. She, therefore, said :

"I cannot tell you, Nariskoff, how sorry I am to hear this news. We had the greatest regard for Ivan de Biron—both my father and myself. Indeed, the Prince was most anxious to be of service to him at Court; but his rise was too rapid to allow of my father's being of any use to him. Ivan should not rail against the Empress, for she was his greatest benefactress; and that, too, after he had taken an active part against her on that memorable night of her seizure of the throne. I heard the Empress, myself, tell all about it. And as for Azra, (I knew her well before she became the great Madame Hurtaldi) I am sure she could not have been unkind to him."

It was not without set purpose that the Princess had, in the foregoing sentences, used Ivan's christian name, in order to show that she readily acknowledged a certain intimacy. Nariskoff resumed the conversation.

"Yes, I agree with you, Princess. This Azra, as you call her, was not the worst-behaved young lady. It was the peasant girl of whom he spoke with most bitterness—the one who had deceived him here. I am not a very clever man in love matters, but I would lay my life that she had sat upon that seat where you are sitting now, Princess. That's the reason why he dragged me up from it so angrily. He would be jealous of your sitting there, I dare say. Try him some

day, Princess, if you should happen to meet with him."

"My good Nariskoff," she replied, "Ivan de Biron was a great friend of mine when we were last here, and I do not see why I should repay his former kindness by endeavouring to plague him with the remembrance of a lost love."

"I don't know that she is lost," replied Nariskoff. "He spoke of her still with a sort of fond bitterness that made me think that she was still very dear to him—dearer than all. This could hardly be, if she had married some peasant youth of her own standing. She is somewhere far away; or, at least he seemed to think so, when he was talking of her."

"The young man appears to be somewhat liberal in his loves and likings," said the Princess. "We certainly heard at St. Petersburg, that he followed the Signora Hurtaldi everywhere."

As she said these words, the Princess stooped down, apparently to aid in the researches which Ingel was busily making at a suspected hole near her feet. But this gesture might have been made to conceal from Nariskoff the expression in her face which she felt she could not master.

"I know but little, as I said before of love matters," Nariskoff replied; "but I have noticed that this liberality of liking, or loving, is apt to come upon a man who has met with some great disappointment which he never forgets."

"I plead equal ignorance with you, Nariskoff, without having your fineness of observation as regards other people. But, methinks, we have talked enough of this somewhat gloomy subject,

for I pity Ivan very much. He was such a good and kind young fellow in former days. I suppose that success has somewhat spoilt him. Ah, Nariskoff, you have not been tried in that crucible. It might remove all that superfluous good nature which must now be so troublesome to you."

Nariskoff was somewhat nettled by this speech, and was preparing a sharp reply, but the Princess, who was anxious to bring the conversation to an end, interrupted his meditations.

"See how beseechingly Ingel looks up at me," she exclaimed. "Not being able to induce that rat or squirrel he has been looking after, to keep him company, he wishes me to take some notice of him. And besides he almost says, it is getting very cold. I think we ought to go home. Have you ever observed, Nariskoff, but perhaps you don't care about animals, how much dogs resemble men, in their love of change, and their fickleness of purpose. They are wild to come out; and then wild to get home again. They must have picked up this changeful humour from the men they have lived with so much; and Ingel, though the best dog in the world, is not in this respect superior to his race. You need not come with me. He is sufficient protection, and I must not shorten your walk. The light of the moon is most favourable to the meditations of such philosophers as you are."

So saying, the Princess rose from her seat; and, bowing to Nariskoff, walked swiftly towards the town.

When left to himself, Nariskoff exclaimed: "A clever girl, a very clever girl; but not so clever as she thinks. How well she parried,

though, my best home-thrusts. I wouldn't mind being in love with her myself, if it were any use to be so. It is a very stupid thing of Nature that makes us least agreeable to look at when we are most agreeable to talk to. Besides the wisest men, from Socrates downwards, have never been happy in their management of these women. It takes all one's time, you see, to manage any one of them: and we wise men have seldom this time to spare. But perhaps, after all, Nature is right. When we question her closely she has generally a good answer to give us. We should then be too loveable, if we were not to diminish in beauty as we advance in wisdom. No, no, it would not do. They would be too miserable when they had to part from us."

It was in such thoughts as these that Nariskoff indulged during the short time that he remained in the forest, to enjoy the brightness of the moon, which the Princess had told him was so favourable to the meditations of the philosophic mind.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER IV.

NARISKOFF'S SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEW WITH IVAN DE
BIRON—IVAN'S STATE OF MIND—THE PRINCESS
MARIE'S FEELINGS.

NARISKOFF resolved now to commence his attack in the other quarter. He paid a visit to Ivan in his log-hut; and found the young man, as usual, deeply immersed in his studies. He was reading the *De Senectute* of Cicero, which naturally led to Nariskoff's uttering sundry sayings about youth and old age. It was his cue not to appear to have any particular design in this visit, and so he was pleased to find any general subject which he could readily discuss. He said that he believed there was once one man who was contented with his age, and this was a middle-aged man. The same man was also contented with his height, and did not wish to be an inch taller or shorter. Boys long to clamber up to youthhood: youths, what fools! aspire to manhood: men of mature age sigh for the light-hearted joys of youth: and old men revenge

themselves upon the world for not growing as dull as they do, by bestowing upon it all the tediousness of old age. Ivan listened with impatience to his friend's comments, not very novel, on this subject, and showed a wish to resume his studies.

Then Nariskoff brought forth the great news which he had come to tell—namely the arrival of the exiled Prince Serbatoff and his daughter at Pelem. The somewhat malicious narrator enjoyed the confusion and excitement which this intelligence, he could easily see, produced in Ivan's mind. There was no longer any wish on Ivan's part to resume the study of the *De Senectute*, for he sought with eagerness to extract from Nariskoff every detail that he could tell him. What was the cause of their exile? Was she looking well? Was she altered? Did she know who were her companions in exile? Ivan did not venture to ask the question directly, Did she know that he was there?

Nariskoff's replies grew colder and more reserved as Ivan's questioning became more and more eager. At length the wily man proposed a walk in the forest—a proposal which was readily accepted by Ivan, in the hope of hearing something more about the Serbatoffs.

It was when they were alone in that vast wood that Nariskoff gave full vent to his imaginative powers. He was not the kind of man to keep within the sober bounds of truth, when he had a purpose in hand—a purpose too, of which he was very proud. He narrated the conversation which he had had with the Princess, but did not fail to throw in sundry starts, and sighs, and blushes, which that proud young woman would have been the last person in the world to have

indulged in, especially in the presence of one whose malicious character she knew so well as she did that of Nariskoff.

Ivan saw at once that the picture was highly coloured, but still there was something in it which was very interesting to him, and which he could not make up his mind wholly to disbelieve. One part was certainly true, and that was the aversion which Nariskoff described as being his feeling towards that "detestable animal," "that little English brute" which the Princess made so much of. But then, as he said, they always make so much of those creatures when they have nothing else to pet.

The conversation was a long one; and when it had ended, and when Ivan was at home and alone again, it furnished him with much food for thought.

The state of Ivan's mind, as regards his affections, was at this time, most bewildered and most miserable. It has before been mentioned that the ideal of life to him, the great object of his ambition, had been to be supremely loved. This is by no means a high order of ambition. The saying "If I love thee, what is that to thee," indicates a much higher and nobler form of the affections; but it would be depicting the character of this young man falsely, if it were said that he was capable of this, the noblest form of loving. On the contrary, it is not unfair to him to say that this desire to be loved, descended even into a desire to be liked; and had, perhaps, been the cause of his anxiety to be kind and gracious to all those with whom he had any converse, and to win even the minor affections of his fellow-men.

He had once, and for all, given up the hope of

winning such love from Azra as would satisfy him. Had she sought him out, even in exile, he would not have accepted her love burdened with the condition that her art was to partake that love with him. After much thought he had renounced her; and, with that renunciation, had given up all hopes of being loved as he desired to be. He was singularly alone in the world. He had parted from his family when young. He had not detected, though perhaps it was there, any loving regard on the part of his master, the Duke of Courland; and the friendship which he had offered to his brother private secretary, the Englishman, had been received in a truly British manner, in which poor Ivan did not perceive any of the warmth and real kindness which lay under it. All these causes had driven him into a studious life; and even before this, his second exile, he had borne the character in St. Petersburg of a moody, studious man. The Empress, while he was in favour, used to speak of him as her young scholar; and would playfully ask him, when receiving his reports, what the wisdom of the ancients was pleased to say that could enlighten us about our modern doings. Elizabeth had really entertained a great liking for the unworldly young man, as she thought him to be; had thoroughly believed in his fidelity; and had been all the more enraged when the reports of those vile spies, grossly exaggerated, told of his presence at entertainments where her character and conduct had been so maliciously, if so justly, defamed.

It would be untruthful to say that Ivan did not often think of the Princess Marie; and now, at Pelem, there were many things that recalled those reminiscences which he could not but feel

were still so dear to him. He marvelled though at her baseness. It deepened all his severe and bitter views of human nature when he revisited those spots, which had been the silent witnesses of those mutual vows, of undying affection which had so often been exchanged between them according to the usual practice of lovers, who must say the same thing, in the same words, over and over again.

And what were her feelings? They were the same as they had ever been. She was the really true lover, whose love had never changed; who had loved him even the most at the time when, thinking their love hopeless, and desiring that it should not be the ruin of his life, she had sought, alas too skilfully! to divert that love into another channel. The Searcher of all hearts could only know in its fulness, what that devoted girl had suffered, while she had endeavoured to make Azra worthy of the love of Ivan, and when she found that her efforts had been successful.

Much was altered now. Ivan was no longer an obscure youth, but one whom statesmen had been wont to recognize as a rising young man. Although the Serbatoffs and Ivan had rarely met in the society of St. Petersburg, there was no one so well acquainted with all the details of his career, with all the hopes that lay before him, as the Princess Marie. She had even fought his battle for him with Azra; and Ivan little imagined that on that very day, a day so fatal to him, as he thought, when Azra refused his offer, and when the officer demanded from him his sword previously to conveying him to Schlüsselburg, the Princess Marie had been closeted with Azra, and had pleaded Ivan's cause, with all the eloquence of which she was mistress.

Had Ivan still been true to the Princess, there might no longer have been much difficulty with her father. The Prince was now a thoroughly broken-spirited man. Even if he should be recalled, of which he had no hope, his courtier-like sagacity foresaw that his time had passed, and that there was but little chance for him of being reinstated in that official place and power which were so dear to him. He had become utterly dependent upon his daughter; and she knew that it was no longer his will, but hers, which governed.

Nariskoff's talk, though she greatly doubted the man's sincerity, had not been without its effect upon her. Proud as she was, her pride could not contend against her love; and she longed, with all the longing that she had known in her earlier days of courtship, to see Ivan again, and to discover if any relic, even the faintest, existed of his former great affection for her. This was a very humble thought for the haughty Princess to entertain; but it was as sincere and genuine as it was humble.

That beneficent law of compensation, which applies to most human affairs, was not wholly inert when dealing even with such a calamity as exile. There are few things more desirable for a human being than that there should be sudden breaks in the ordinary routine of his existence. Great kings were wont, in ancient times, to go into retreat in monasteries, from whence, let us hope, they occasionally emerged as better men. Exile, terrible as it was, afforded one of those breaks in the continuity of life which are often so serviceable to the soul. The course of most men's inner lives is like that of one who is placed upon an inclined plane; and, when once started, the

man descends in an unvarying fashion, and with only the change that is produced by accelerated speed. There is little opportunity for a profound review, to be made by himself, of his conduct, his opinions, or his habits.

The exile, on the contrary, diverted from all his former occupations, entering upon what might well be called a new life, with new companions, new surrounding scenery, above all new relations to the fellow-creatures who were nearest to him, must, perforce, have entertained new thoughts; and though, humanly speaking, it may appear to have been a great disaster for men like Marshal Münnich and the Duke of Courland to have been suddenly wrenched from power and sent into exile, it was perhaps one of the greatest benefits which could have been provided for them. Though this effect was, naturally, most potent and most vivid in cases such as theirs, it was also very potent in the case of those younger and minor personages, such as Ivan de Biron and the Princess Marie, who were subjected to it.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER V.

MARSHAL MÜNNICH AS AN EXILE—INVITES DE BIRON
TO HIS HOUSE.

MARSHAL MÜNNICH was the great man at Pelem ; and, as was said before, the extraordinary vivacity of this renowned General was not to be dulled by any adverse circumstances. The vigour which he had shown upon the banks of the Pruth, or in his battles with the great Seraskier, was no greater than that which he manifested in organizing and leading society in obscure little Pelem.

The General gave parties ; and, to the astonishment of the new exiles, he had resolved to invite Ivan de Biron ; a fact which was known to the gossips of the town, and was much canvassed by them, not altogether with approval. They did not see that circumstances were much altered. In the first place the General had become a very religious man ; and, in accordance with that spirit, it was his duty to forgive his enemies, especially those whom he had more particularly injured. In the next, Münnich felt

that he had had the better of his great enemy, the Duke of Courland. Then too, the Field Marshal had been greatly disgusted with the ingratitude, as he held it to be, of the Duchess Regent towards him. "If it had all to come over again" he would say to his familiar friends, "I almost think I would rather have stood by the Regent Duke, false as he is, than by that falsar, feeblar creature, the Duchess Regent. "You know, my dear," he would say, when talking to his wife of the past, "that when you women are bad, and weak, you are worse and weaker than even men are."

All these impressions might not have prevailed with Münnich to induce him to receive and welcome any one bearing the hated name of Biron, had it not been for a circumstance apparently very slight, which yet had great effect. It is these minor motives which often make the larger ones converge to a conclusion. That new church which the Field Marshal had caused to be built, was now his favourite hobby. Ivan de Biron's voice, though somewhat uncultivated, was a very sonorous one; and the Field Marshal had been told that he would do well to secure him as a leader of the choir.

Accordingly it happened that to the first party which Münnich gave after the arrival of the Serbatoffs, Ivan was invited.

He was at first rather doubtful as to accepting the invitation; but he, too, had his little motive which was very potent with him. The Princess Marie would doubtless be there. He would like to see how she would receive him. How would that false girl now behave to him?

Nariskoff's description might be highly coloured, but still there was probably some truth

in it. Doubtless the Princess suspected that Nariskoff knew what had really happened, and wished to put herself in the right, even with him. False as they are, Ivan said to himself, they do not like that other men should know how false they are. He recollected their meeting at the Empress's first ball at St. Petersburg. He could play that part which she had then played so well. He could be the kind, gracious, patronizing friend. He was now the older inhabitant at Pelem—the one who had a right to patronize and to proffer service to the new comers.

It was with such bitter thoughts as these, in which there was a certain sweetness mingled with the bitterness, that Ivan prepared to attend the Field Marshal's party.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "Münnich has no new act of treason in his head. He cannot seize upon me as he did before, and send me further into exile."

All Ivan's previous thoughts and reasonings must have been much disturbed and controverted by the way in which the Field Marshal did in fact receive him.

"Ah," he said, "Ah, Biron. We had a little the better of you, my young friend, when last we had dealings with you. How is his Highness the ex-Regent? would he were here to-night, though I fear he bears me far more malice than I do him. We have both been the dupes of a woman, Baron. You see some of us are not so young as you; and even you young fellows are sometimes duped as much as the old ones are. Ha! the beautiful Marie Andréevna," exclaimed the general, suddenly perceiving the entrance of the Princess. "It cannot be said that we poor

exiles at Pelem are much to be pitied while we have the greatest beauty of Elizabeth's court with us,—Eh! Baron. I am sure it is not for us young men to regret our exile.”

So saying, the gallant Marshal made his way to that part of the room where the Countess Münnich was receiving her guests.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER VI.

THE CONDUCT OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES AT THE MARSHAL'S PARTY.

It had been with very gloomy thoughts, and in a very hard and determined frame of mind, that Ivan had entered a house which had been the scene of so much misery, and yet of so much joy to him. Here it was that he had often covertly watched the Duke of Courland—longing, but unable, to soothe the wretchedness of his great fellow exile; striving, but unable, to divert his own mind from the unavailing contemplation of this wretchedness. It seemed a kind of profanation to him, that this house should now be the scene of aught that was festive. He bethought him of what his Italian mother had once told him of some grand palace—was it in Venice, Mantua, or Milan, he could not remember?—where the state rooms were over the prison, so that the prisoners dimly partook of any palatial festivities that were going on above them.

Then the joy, his own private joy, of which the

rooms in that house had been witnesses—the joy of first love—when he had parted, not unwillingly from her, that in this very room he might, alone, or unheeded by his gloomy master, have more time and freedom to meditate upon her manifold perfections, than he could command in her presence.

All this was no matter now, as he said to himself, endeavouring to drive these thoughts of by-gone days away. Had he not once and for all completely planned out his life for the future? Besides, after the fashion of the young, who, when they have met with some disappointment, are wont to make out to themselves that they are old, if not in years, at any rate in heart and mind, and even to be somewhat proud of this feeling of age, Ivan considered that he had finally concluded with all matters relating to the affections, and was henceforth to seek in intellectual employment that peace which had fled from him as an ambitious man and as a lover.

He did not deceive himself, when he told himself that he no longer loved Azra; and that, if she were now to consent to marry him, that consent would meet with a most unwilling response from him. In the course of his long and wearisome journey to Siberia, far more wearisome than it had been on the first occasion of his exile, he had reasoned much with himself respecting his love for Azra and of the nature of her character. He began for the first time to comprehend fully that she was a consummate artist, and that no other affection would dethrone from her mind her supreme love of art. This, in his eyes, was a fatal blot upon the character; and from the moment that he thoroughly recognized its existence, she was for ever lost to him.

His sentiments, as regards the Princess, were of a very different, and of a much more mixed character. Nariskoff's reports of her conversations with him, had not been without some effect upon Ivan; but an effect very different from that which Nariskoff had aimed to produce. There may be no word in the Russian language which exactly represents the word flirtation; but there is no people, however primitive, or however refined, amongst whom the idea sought to be conveyed by that word, is unknown. Ivan said very bitterly to himself, after listening to Nariskoff's adroit misrepresentations, "This girl will now, I suppose, be contented, and even pleased, to receive those attentions from me which she can no longer have from her Dukes, her Princes, or her Counts. But no woman shall deceive me twice. We have seen a good many inundations of the Neva; and know now when the ice is dangerous."

It was in this mood of mind that Ivan had entered that two-storied house, the chief one in Pelem, which was so well known to him. He had rather feared his first introduction to the Marshal, considering all that had passed between the houses of Münnich and Biron; but the cordial reception which the veteran had given him, at once served to put Ivan at his ease in that company where there were still many persons who bore great enmity to the Duke of Courland. These, however, followed the example of their host; and Ivan was astonished to find how much he had exaggerated the difficulties which he thought he should have to overcome in entering, for the first time, the select company of exiles at Pelem.

His eyes had followed the Field Marshal's

when the Princess Marie was entering the room, and had anxiously gazed at that countenance, which, despite his firm resolves of aversion, he had somewhat curiously longed to see. He was not a little shocked when he did see it, for it bore the evident marks of distress and suffering.

"I do believe," he said to himself, "that she is a good daughter, though a bad woman in other respects;" and then he added spitefully, "besides her exile from the Court must be very bitter to such a lover of grandeur; and whom does she leave behind? Some fool like me, no doubt; unless, indeed, he is of princely origin."

The parts which these two had now to play were entirely reversed from what they had been when they met at the Empress Elizabeth's first ball at St. Petersburg. It was the Princess who was now longing for kind recognition; it was Ivan who was studying how to make this recognition on his part purely friendly, and nothing more. With a feeling of its being desirable to get over as quickly as possible a disagreeable meeting, he lost no time in going to that part of the room where the Princess was, and addressing her. There was no deficiency of subjects to talk about, that were entirely suited to the friendly character which Ivan aimed at adopting. One exile had always much to tell, and much to listen to, when meeting another for the first time.

Ivan and Marie found that the causes of their exile were exactly similar. The Serbatoffs and Ivan were, alike, victims of the so-called "Lapouschin conspiracy," and were, alike, innocent victims. They did not hesitate to speak in the strongest terms of condemnation to one another

of the fate of the beautiful Countess, little imagining that no one in that vast Empire mourned over that fate with such intensity of anguish and remorse as did the Czarina herself.

But even in this conversation, the bitterness of Ivan towards women in general did not fail to find some expression; for he commented upon the bad use the Countess had made of her beauty, and her talents, and the infamous use which the jealous Empress had made of her power, when her rival in beauty and in talent fell under it.

"We were all," said Ivan, "equally foolish not to foresee that the baseness of these two women would be our ruin, if we did not keep aloof from both of them."

This was the final remark which Ivan made upon the subject, as he withdrew from the Princess, and went to pay his respects to the Countess Münnich, to whom he had not, hitherto, been presented.

It was in accordance with the pitying nature of women, that the Princess Marie was much struck and saddened by the change in Ivan's appearance. The extent of the change was impressed upon her when she compared the present Ivan with the Ivan of their former exile, and she did not love him the less, but all the more, for the signs of sorrow and suffering which were now marked upon his countenance—some of which sorrow and suffering she could not help attributing to her own manœuvres, which had turned out so unsuccessfully.

A party, at which the Field Marshal was the host, could never be dull. There was animated conversation among the elder guests in which

Ivan was allowed to join. There were games at cards of which the Russians in that day were exceedingly fond—especially of those games, such as the *Grande Patience*, in which the future fortunes of the players were supposed to be indicated.

Later on in the evening, the gay Marshal proposed a dance, and followed up his proposal by soliciting the Princess Marie to be his partner. The gaiety of Münnich was infectious. Had any traveller, uninformed as to the use to which the town of Pelem had been mainly put by Russian statesmen, entered that room, on his journey through that town, he might have been struck by the odd contrast between the sordid furniture of the apartment and the high-sounding names of its occupants. But little would he have imagined that it was a company of exiles whom he was surveying, each one of whom had a very sad story to tell.

Ivan was the kind of man to do everything well that he condescended to do ; and he danced admirably. Somehow or other his conclusion that he was already a very aged person did not prevent his entering very heartily into the mirthful spirit of that evening. Nariskoff, who had contrived to get an invitation to this party, rather surprised some one who knew his morbid humour and wished to extract from him some spiteful comment upon the merry scene, by replying to this man's remarks upon the folly of it in these words.

“I don't see the especial folly. One thing is not more foolish than another in human life ; and if you come to that—to measuring the folly of any particular transaction, I should rather say that dancing was about the least foolish thing

that human beings had ever invented. You know it must be very delightful to whirl about, or to be whirled about by, anybody that one liked very much. You and I are long past all that sort of thing."

Now it must not be supposed that this eulogium of dancing, however true, represented Nariskoff's real opinion; but he was in an especially bad temper, and would not have agreed with anything that anybody said on this occasion. He had been watching for some good result of the scheme he had laboured at so much. He had stealthily approached Ivan and the Princess, while they were talking to one another, and had overheard enough of the conversation to ascertain that, for the moment at any rate, his scheme had failed. Observing Ivan studiously for the remainder of the evening, he saw that his friend never approached the Princess, and indeed that she was almost the only woman in the room, young or old, whom Ivan did not ask to dance.

The revels ended; and the Princess was accompanied to her father's house (for the Prince had not come with her) by some of those young men who had had the honour of dancing with her.

When alone in her chamber she exclaimed "He is lost to me for ever—for ever! Holy Father" (turning to the lighted picture in the corner of the room), "he is lost to me for ever."

The Princess was one of those rare women whose tears are very distant—who weep inwardly if they weep at all. Ivan had, in former days, been much struck, and somewhat grieved, at this apparent hardness. It was a very unusual condition at that period and in that country, when even men shed tears with alarming facility. But

Marie Andréevna had almost arrived at that state which is now the virile state in the most civilized nations, and which only allows tears to arise, artistically if we may say so—upon the touching representation of tearful subjects; but which ignores their existence in reference to private and personal sorrows.

When disasters had occurred at that wretched town, and when other women were weeping and wailing, the Princess had been very sympathizing, very helpful, but never tearful. Had Ivan seen her now, he would have been astounded at her agony of tears, and still more, perhaps, at the fond words which every now and then broke from her, and were associated with his own name.

The consolations which philosophy affords are but cold comfort to offer to those who are suffering from unrequited love. But if such persons could then think steadily and severely, they might see what a large thing it is to demand that their love should be responded to. The same course of thought would apply to the demand, often silently though ardently made, for liking, for friendship, or for the full acknowledgment of the claims of relationship; and, in these minor cases, the voice of reason might sometimes, perhaps, get a hearing. Persons desiring this love, this liking, or this friendship, might possibly bethink themselves that what they secretly demand, it is absolutely impossible for others to give. Why even their very virtues and their merits may stand in the way of fulfilment of their wishes! They may be very loveable or likeable; but it is the influence which that loveableness or likeableness of theirs has over another person by reason of his, or her, peculiar susceptibility to it, that is

in question. And how large a thing it is to expect that the two susceptibilities should be equivalent; and in short, that if it chanced that I love you, it would also be likely to happen that you should love me.

These reflections do not exactly apply to the feelings of the Princess Marie at this period, for she had been loved by Ivan, and had, therefore, at one time satisfied his ideal of what was loveable in woman. But her subsequent conduct had introduced a new element which was now fatal to her renewed desire to be loved; and so she must be left to mourn and wail over the loss of that love which she had, however nobly and with whatever self-sacrifice, thrust from her.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER VII.

NARISKOFF'S FEARS—A RUSSIAN CEREMONY—NARISKOFF'S FEARS REALIZED.

THE junior clerk who, meaning most kindly to Ivan, had assigned Pelem as his place of exile, could have known but little of Siberian geography.

In speaking of Siberia, one is apt to forget its immense extent, and, consequently, the great diversity which exists in climate and natural scenery in different parts of that vast Empire, for an Empire it is in itself. There are spots of almost unrivalled beauty and grandeur in Siberia; but Pelem was not one of these. It is generally supposed by those who have studied the geography of Siberia, that Pelem was chosen as a place of exile for great political delinquents, on account of its super-eminent disadvantages of climate and situation. For the most part it was approached through vast woods and extensive marshes; and a more dreary and forbidding landscape than that which met the

Exile's eyes as he neared the place of his destination, when that place was Pelem, cannot well be imagined.

The town itself is situated on the river Tavda, an affluent of the river Tobol, from which the district of Tobolsk takes its name. At a little more than half a mile above the town, the river Pelem also falls into the Tobol; and at a much further distance lies the Lake of Pelem.

The winter which preceded that spring when the new batch of exiles (of whom Ivan was one) arrived at Pelem, had been a very severe one. Quicksilver had frozen to such a degree of hardness that ingenious persons had amused themselves by carving little images out of that metal, ordinarily so fluent. The spring, which followed this winter, had come with unusual suddenness and warmth. The experienced inhabitants of the town were in mortal fear of inundation; but their apprehensions did not at first reach the higher classes (the exiles); or, if so, were disregarded by them. Why, indeed, should they fret themselves about a disaster which, if it did come, they could in nowise prevent, or even guard against?

Nariskoff, a timid man, and one who consorted with all ranks of people, was greatly alarmed at what he heard of the results of former inundations, and of the threatening of a greater inundation than ever at the present moment, for so the fears of the peasantry were expressed. Putting aside all his plans for bringing Ivan and the Princess into more favourable relations with each other, Nariskoff now talked of nothing else to Ivan but the prospect of their being overwhelmed by some fatal inundation. Ivan listened with great indifference to these fears of Nariskoff's, though

he could not but take some heed of the facts which Nariskoff, day by day, brought to his notice—such as the rise in inches of the three rivers, and of a slight overflow which had already taken place, according to the report of the peasantry, of the lake of Pelem. This Lake had then a circumference of about fifty-six English miles.

Nariskoff, finding that Ivan turned a deaf ear to all his fears and forebodings, made them known to the Field Marshal. That great engineer, however, did not see his way to do anything which should be a real protection to the town, especially considering the shortness of time that remained for action, if an inundation were to take place on account of the rapid and fierce advent of the spring.

The thoughts of the other inhabitants, even of the frightened peasantry themselves, were much diverted from alarm by the prospect of a coming ceremonial of the Greek Church, which was of the greatest interest to them. The Patron Saint of Turinsk was to pay a visit to the Patron Saint of Pelem.

The form of the ceremony was as follows. The patron Saint of Turinsk was to be conducted by priests and white-robed maidens on the road to Pelem. The Saint of that town was to be borne in like manner to meet its brother Saint; was to receive it with due ceremony; and then to accompany it to its own church. The stranger Saint was there to be honoured with certain prayers and hymns; and was afterwards to be escorted by the Saint of Pelem and the inhabitants of the town for a certain distance on its road home. This final part of the ceremony was to take place the same evening.

Much and diverse preparation was made by

both towns for this coming ceremonial. Robes had to be prepared; hymns had to be practised; and whatever, in that dismal district, of flower and foliage could be got to grace the festival, was to be eagerly sought for.

Meanwhile, not less threatening, though less heeded, were the accounts which Nariskoff heard from the peasantry, and reported to all those who would listen to him, showing the proximity of danger from the rapid rising of the rivers.

Ivan had been solicited to take a part in the forthcoming festive proceedings; but he had resolutely kept aloof from them. His superior enlightenment, or what he supposed to be such, made him despise this childish ceremony, as he called it, of the meeting of the Patron Saints. Besides, if he were to take any part in it, this might bring him more in contact with the Princess Marie; and he had absolutely determined to avoid any companionship with her. She, though with a heavy heart, was obliged to give her services. Her superior knowledge of music naturally conferred upon her the place of leader in the choir of maidens, who were to take so large a part in the ceremony. And, moreover, being a duteous daughter of her Church, she did not perceive any childishness, or irreverence, in this festival.

The eventful day dawned. It was a day of unusual heat for that season; but this, though an additional danger, was disregarded. That it was fine weather at that moment, was a fact which delighted all the inhabitants of Pelem, whatever mischief might thereupon accrue.

Very early in the morning, even before daylight, they had marched out with their Saint,

and had arrived at the spot where a long, narrow, wooden bridge spanned the river Tavda. At this bridge, according to the usage of former years, the Pelemites waited for the arrival of the stranger Saint from Turinsk. On the present occasion it did not make its welcome presence visible until many hours after the accustomed time of meeting.

During the interval of waiting, the men of Pelem beguiled the time, partly by singing hymns, partly by uttering very severe objurgations on the dilatory nature of the men of Turinsk.

One old man told his fellow-citizens, that a similar delay had occurred forty years ago, long before most of them had been born, and that he remembered it because it preceded by three days the great inundation which had swept away the palisading and one-third of the town of Pelem. For the moment this unpleasant reminiscence awoke the fears of the crowd; but these were soon forgotten when the stranger Saint, accompanied by a larger number than usual of the young men and maidens of Turinsk, was first visible in the distance.

When, however, those of Turinsk had joined their fellow-worshippers of Pelem, sad were the stories they had to tell of the difficulties and dangers they had undergone. Bridges had been carried away; small rivulets were now rivers; and morasses were lakes. They would never have reached the spot, if they had not made detours, which they estimated, perhaps with some exaggeration, as having lengthened out the distance more than fourteen miles.

The men of Pelem were glad to tell them that there was no extraordinary difficulty to be met

with between the wooden bridge and the town of Pelem.

The intensity of religious feeling which this ceremony produced, sufficed to lull all fears, and the procession moved gladly on towards the town.

The elder personages, who had remained in the town, such as Marshal Münnich, his Countess, and Prince Serbatoff, together with those whom sickness had prevented from attending the ceremony, had not been without great anxiety during these hours of suspense which preceded the return of their own people, and the advent of the Saints into the town.

Nariskoff, as may be imagined, had not taken any part in this religious ceremonial. He had occupied himself in going from house to house of those persons who had been obliged to remain, adding to their alarm by his declaration that something dreadful must have occurred: that, for his part, he was sure that the Lake of Pelem had broken all bounds, and had overwhelmed priests, and Saints, and their foolish worshippers. The sneers and scoffs of the irreverent Nariskoff at the folly of the ceremonial, would have brought down condign punishment upon his head, if he had addressed them to any persons but the sickly, the aged, and the judicious.

Throughout the greater part of the day he was in and out of Ivan's log-hut, fulminating diatribes against all religious services, and those of the Greek Church in particular, and assuring Ivan, that now one of his troubles would be well over, for that he would never more see anything of that hard-hearted young lady, the Princess Marie Andréevna.

Ivan had not large faith in anything that Nariskoff could say; but still he was so much moved by it, and, to say the truth, so much plagued by Nariskoff's constant interruptions, that he resolved to go out, and see whether anything had happened.

He asked Nariskoff to accompany him; but that prudent personage entirely declined to do so, saying that he must stay in the town to comfort poor Prince Serbatoff, and that bedridden Polish lady, Tatiana Michäelovna Selinofsky, both of those "exceedingly foolish persons" having, as he said, allowed their only daughters to take a principal part in this idiotic business. If he had been blessed, or cursed, with a daughter, (he really should not like to pledge himself as to whether children were more of a blessing or a curse) he should at least have been wise enough, or paternal enough, to have kept the girl at home to-day.

Ivan made no reply, but left his hut, and went quickly out of the town. He soon met the procession coming back in a high state of jubilation; and, on doing so, almost regretted that he had been induced by Nariskoff's timidity to quit his studies. He was not, however, unobservant of certain signs which led him to believe that there was still some danger to be apprehended. Amongst other things, he noticed that in certain spots which, hitherto, though bordering upon morasses, had always afforded a sure footing, there were gurgling noises and a slight bubbling up of water, such as may often be seen in the springs which are the origin of great rivers—and that the footing was no longer sure.

Ivan joined the procession, and lent his voice in the singing of the hymns. All was now glad-

ness and merriment. The men of Turinsk seemed to have forgotten their previous labours and difficulties: the men of Pelem had forgotten their vexation and their anger at the delay which had occurred.

Ivan drew near to the Princess Marie, and spoke anxiously to her of the signs of danger he had noticed, at the same time suggesting that it might not be prudent on her part to accompany the stranger Saint on its return home.

The Princess Marie had observed that he had addressed several persons before he approached her; and, from his gestures she conjectured, and rightly, that he had been making similar suggestions to them. Moreover, he had spoken coldly; had shown no interest on his own account; had chiefly alluded to any anxiety she might cause her father; and, what was worse, had even spoken contemptuously, though not exactly in Nariskoff's language, of the silliness of the whole proceeding. She, therefore, replied coldly, merely saying that she should not desert her post, and indeed that it was impossible for her to do so, seeing that she was the leader of the choir of their own maidens. He made no further attempt to dissuade her; and did not long remain by her side.

There was great feasting in Pelem that day; and never was more abundant honour shown to the stranger Saint of Turinsk.

Then the procession was formed for the return; and it left the town with more joyous sounds of religious mirthfulness than had ever been known on any previous occasion. Whatever fear of danger or of difficulty survived in the breasts of the joyful throng, only served to give force to, and enhance, the fervour of their devotion.

Ivan did not make one of this procession ; but he looked long and wistfully after it, as it left the town ; and there was a vague and indefinable sensation of fear at his heart, which he could not quite dispel. He returned to his books ; but, somehow or other, he found that he could not command his attention ; and he began to think, with almost a contempt for himself, that he wished Nariskoff would come and worry him again, and urge him to go out. "Otherwise I shall not go," he said, "for these are mere foolish fancies ; but that poor Prince would indeed be a miserable creature if anything were to happen to her."

Half an hour had not passed before Nariskoff did make his appearance in Ivan's hut ; and this time his alarm was pitiful to behold.

It is a curious fact, but it is a fact, that we often find that those persons whose lives seem to have least in them that should be worth preserving, appear to have most care for living on.

Nariskoff did not urge Ivan to go out in search of the procession ; but suggested that they should both pay a visit to the Marshal, and stay in his upper room if anything should happen. He, Nariskoff, had heard, in the last half-hour, strange noises. "Come out now, De Biron, and see if you do not hear them."

Ivan did come, and walked with Nariskoff to that end of the town opposite to the one which led to the wood. He, too, thought that he heard strange noises, not exactly like the murmur of winds, or distant thunder, or like any sound that had hitherto been known to him. Without saying another word, the two companions separated.

Nariskoff went to the Marshal's house to pay a visit which he resolved should be a long one,

while Ivan started off, at a swift pace, on the road which the procession had taken. As he did so, the alarming sounds became more defined. He could hardly doubt that danger was coming, and made great speed to meet it. In a moment, as it were, though only for a moment, the old love returned upon him with all its force—indeed with a deeper feeling than ever—as he thought of the imminent danger of her who was once so dear to him. He had no doubt now of what was about to happen.

And, indeed, it had begun to happen. The swollen river and the full-to-overflowing lake had, together, at the same moment, burst their bounds; and about six miles off had formed volumes of water, which were descending upon the town. Awful as the danger was, it was not so great as it would have been in any country that did not offer so vast a plain as that surrounding Pelem did, for the waters to flow over. Moreover, as it was afterwards ascertained, there were two separate floods; and the weaker wave had come first.

Ivan rushed forward at his utmost speed. At length he came in sight of the procession hurrying back. The Saint of Pelem was still held aloft by the devoted acolytes; and close around it, some order was still maintained. But, in front, the terror-stricken crowd, pursued by the waters, were struggling onwards in complete disorder. Ivan rendered what assistance he could to some of the weaker ones, who were the foremost of the stragglers; but soon made his way to the denser part of the multitude, amongst whom was the Princess Marie, still maintaining her place, and still, though few voices joined with hers, singing a hymn of joy and deliverance which

sounded strangely in that scene of horror. The danger was not yet by any means at its uttermost; but, as it increased, men, women and children, deserting all order, rushed madly on.

In ten minutes the full flood had come with all its force upon them; and it was now that the weaker part of the crowd had to battle for dear life. Ivan was by Marie's side. He had caught up a child of about three years old, and bore it in his arms. He did not speak a word to the Princess, nor she to him; but he offered his hand, which she grasped; and they fled on together. Though the flood which surrounded them was still shallow, spreading as it did over that immense plain, there were spots where the waters of the flood, falling upon some portion of morass, were many feet in depth. Into one of these the Princess eventually fell; and her fall was nearly being disastrous to Ivan and the child he carried with him. He, however, kept his footing and succeeded in extricating her. He then bade her take the child in her arms. There was a certain sternness, at the moment, in his tone; and she at once obeyed him. He then lifted her up in his arms, and carried her on towards the town. Once they were very near destruction, for Ivan himself fell, but fortunately it was not in a morass; and, while falling, he retained hold of the Princess, and even kept her above the water. At length, in a state of great exhaustion he reached the town, and bore his burden in safety to her father's house. During their perilous progress through the waters, neither the Princess nor Ivan had spoken.

The gratitude of the Prince found full vent in words; but words seem to have been denied

to the Princess. At last, however, she faintly and hesitatingly thanked Ivan ; and he went away to see if he could find the parents of the child, to restore it to them.

The town of Pelem was not overwhelmed by this inundation, nor was there much loss of life, except amongst the children. The state, however, of those people, the majority of the town, who dwelt in log-huts, was very deplorable. The Prince could do no less (and he did it gratefully and gladly) than invite Ivan to share their home ; but to the astonishment of the Prince, though not to that of his daughter, this kindly offer was distinctly declined.

In fact, and certainly in fiction, such an adventure as that which has just been recorded, generally serves to bring even estranged lovers together again in harmony, and at least to remove some part of the estrangement ; but it did not do so with Ivan and the Princess Marie. After the flood had abated, and the town had resumed its customary aspect, there was no change to be noticed in the relation between these two, unless, indeed, it might have been seen that the Princess Marie grew embarrassed, and shrank timidly back if she could do so without observation, whenever, by accident, Ivan approached her. This mode of conduct was very unusual in the Princess, and very repugnant to her resolute and still somewhat haughty nature. But the feeling which induced such conduct was that of one who has a debt of gratitude to pay and cannot pay it ; who knows, moreover, that an attempt to pay it, would only be met by a haughty disavowal on the part of the benefactor of any payment of the kind being necessary.

Notwithstanding this silence, for hardly a word ever passed between Ivan and the Princess, each could not help thinking a great deal of the other, and still more did each think anxiously of his or her own feeling towards that other. The Princess strove to think down her love: Ivan, to prevent his from rising again into full life to torment him. But self-examination of this kind does not tend to peace; and, as one who listens intently at night, will hear noises, and the more abundantly, the more he dreads to hear them, so the Princess and Ivan found that their much inquiry, as regards the feelings of their own hearts, did not allay alarm by reassuring them of stillness.

BOOK VII.

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CHAPTER I.

AZRA APPEARS IN A NEW OPERA—THE EMPRESS
AND THE ACTRESS—AZRA ASKS FOR AN AUDIENCE
—THE EMPRESS RECEIVES HER ON THE FOLLOW-
ING DAY.

THIS narrative includes many migrations of persons, and many changes of scene. Though Pelem and St. Petersburg are very widely apart, they were yet, in those days, very intimately connected; and, as it has been seen, any signal event at the capital resulted in consequences at Pelem of the most joyful or the saddest kind.

With most persons it is some distant event, some event over which they have had no control, that has the greatest influence over their fortunes. It is as if each life were represented by a ray of light; and where these rays intersect, especially if they are rays of strength, there is formed a focus of consuming power, which has abiding influence for good, or evil, on the lives in question.

When mention was last made of Azra, she had

returned to rehearsal after a painful interview with Ivan; had seen him taken away as a prisoner; and, after a few days' interval, had appeared on the stage in the opera in which she had performed the principal part at Paris.

For some reason or other, this opera did not suit the Russian taste; and, after running a short time, was set aside in favour of an old Russian play, adapted to music and descriptive of a by-gone period in Russian history. It was a very poor thing when compared with the opera which Azra had brought from Paris; but there was, at that time, in Russia, a great dislike for, and jealousy of, any foreigner; and this dislike and jealousy extended to foreign things, as well as persons.

Azra, who had learnt in Paris that most expressive of gestures, the shrugging of the shoulders, made no further objection to the manager's proposal to bring this Russian play upon the stage, than what might have been indicated by this gesture. Then, like a true artist, who disdains to be suppressed by any inferiority in the work to be done, Azra threw all her force and energy into the preparation for her new part.

The Czarina had much better taste than most of those, even of the highest rank and best education, whom she governed. She would, probably, have much preferred to listen to the Parisian opera. Finding, however, from the talk at Court, that this opera was not particularly acceptable to a Russian audience, the politic Empress did not encourage the continued performance of it by her Imperial presence. When the native opera, if so it may be called, though the music was chiefly selected from

Rameau's works, was brought upon the stage, and was pronounced to be successful, the Empress went in state to hear it.

Azra was one of those persons who always try to do their best; and if she had had to play in a barn before rude boors, she would not have neglected to put forth her utmost powers. Encouragement, no doubt, had the same sympathetic effect upon her that it almost always has upon those, whether orators, musicians, or singers, who have to present themselves, as it were, to the public. This, in her case as in that of most artists, is not an effect of gratified vanity, but a pure result of appreciative sympathy. How can one know when one is pleasing others, unless they are good enough to tell one so? and no man, or woman, knows what he, or she, can do in any department of life, until they have received the immense impulse which appreciation gives to all the sons and daughters of mankind.

The Czarina perceived at once how pleasing to her subjects this opera must be; and, bound by no small notions of Imperial etiquette, was as hearty in her applause as any one of the meanest of her subjects in the gallery.

The part which Azra had to perform in this opera, was that of a Queen; and the good-natured Elizabeth more than once remarked to her favourite Mavra Schepelof, loudly enough to be heard by the surrounding courtiers, that the little woman was quite a Queen, and that she (Elizabeth) would do well to take some lessons from her, in order to perform her own part more effectively.

At the end of the fourth act, the Empress sent for the actress.

The Russian Court, from the days of Peter the

Great to the present time, has ever been most munificent in its recognition of artistic talent. The Czarina had chosen a splendid present for the Signora Hurtaldi; and it would have been given, if the performance had been only of a mediocre character; but, on this occasion, it was felt both by the Sovereign and by her suite that the gift, however splendid, was amply deserved.

It is rarely allowed to monarchs to blame; and sometimes they must, almost perforce, (unless they are very sincere persons,) praise somewhat insincerely. It must, therefore, be a peculiar pleasure to them when a hearty sense of approval unites with policy, and when they can praise, not merely representatively and officially, but also individually and personally. Elizabeth really looked forward with pleasure to the approach of the mimic sovereign. The reception was in the ante-chamber to the Imperial box. Azra entered, conducted by the manager; and, kneeling before the Empress, kissed her hand.

"Rise, my sister," said Elizabeth, "it ill becomes so great a Queen to kneel to any other monarch."

So saying, she stooped down a little, for she was much taller than Azra, and kissed her on the cheek.

"We wished to tell you, sister mine, how pleased We have been with your performance. We have been saying that We ourselves might have learnt something from your dignity, for the Imperial acting on Our own stage. We hope that Our good sister will deign to accept this slight token of sisterly regard."

The Empress then placed in Azra's hands a bracelet of great value. It was composed of diamonds and turquoises (turquoises were then

very rare), which encircled a portrait of the Empress herself.

Azra took it, and then said :—"The portrait, madam, will ever be most dear to me; and the jewels are most beautiful; but oh, if I might ask for something more precious to me than all the jewels in the world."

Elizabeth's face darkened a little. She was not accustomed to find her gifts so coldly received.

The quick-sighted gypsy did not fail to notice the stern expression which came over the Empress's countenance. Azra's presence of mind was lost for the moment: she hung her head, and looked like the shy young girl that she had shown herself to be when she first entered the Serbatoff Palace to plead for Ivan with the Princess Marie.

The Empress immediately noticed the change. She was mollified by it, and smiled. She may have thought to herself how soon the mimic sovereign pales before the real one. And then she said :—"Well, child, what is it that you want? We thought jewels were not unwelcome to any of our sex. Men, at least, are pleased to say so; and whatever they say, signora, must approach a wisdom that our lower nature cannot attain to. Is it not so, my Lords?"

Azra, encouraged by the playful words of the Czarina, found boldness enough to say. "If I might see Your Majesty alone, I would venture to make my humble request."

"You shall have your wish, my child. My Lord Chamberlain, see that the Signora Hurtaldi has an audience of us to-morrow afternoon."

After this, Azra was conducted from the ante-chamber by the manager; and, in a few minutes, appeared again upon the stage.

Her performance, in the fifth act, was very fitful. Sometimes she was as queenly as ever, and her voice was as rich, full, and true as ever : at other times she was singularly embarrassed and ineffective. Those who were connoisseurs in acting, remarked that the Signora must be ill, but still what a great actress she was ; and how wonderfully she bore up against this sudden attack of illness.

The Empress was very thoughtful during this fifth act. The rapid changes in Azra's mode of acting were not lost upon her. " I wonder," she said to her favourite, " what her stage majesty wants : what a refined creature she is ! Avarice, love, vanity,—these are the three levers that move womankind. Aye, and mankind too, my Mavra. The first does not move her : the third may do so, for in this theatrical world there are as many jealousies and vanities, I believe, as at a Court ; and she may have some grievance against the manager."

Meanwhile, as the acting went on, the Empress suddenly said. " No, Mavra, it is not vanity : the embarrassment is too great for that. There only remains 'love,' and what can I do for that ? We, ourselves cannot make people love us who foolishly decline to do so, (here the Empress whispered something to her favourite), and, as for comforting all the distressed damsels of our Empire, that would indeed be a task beyond Imperial, perhaps beyond angelic, power ! "

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER II.

THE EMPRESS'S CONJECTURES AS TO THE IDENTITY OF AZRA—AZRA'S AUDIENCE.

GREAT sovereigns are apt to have long memories, and are peculiarly vexed if their memory fails them on any point. It seemed strange to herself, but the Empress Elizabeth, as she returned to the Winter Palace, could not help thinking over the events of the evening's performance at the opera, and when she was under the hands of her tire-women, she suddenly exclaimed. "I see it all: what a beclouded being I have been, Mavra! (The favourite was still with her Royal mistress.) That is the gypsy girl: the sister—the so-called sister—of that learned traitor, Ivan de Biron. Her jewels and her queenly presence, for the girl has something regal about her, deceived me for the moment; but, when she held the bracelet in her hand, and looked anything but like a queen, it was the same girl who claimed that unfaithful Ivan as her brother—unfaithful to her, I doubt not, as to

me his sovereign. Ah! They are a bad set these men: not worthy of us, Mavra, fickle as the west wind."

The favourite thought to herself, but did not utter the thought, that if she might judge from her imperial mistress's conduct, fickleness was not entirely confined to men; but she merely replied:—"Your majesty is doubtless right, it must be the same person. Your majesty never forgets a face."

"It is so, Mavra; I am certain of it—and she will come to intercede for him: his infidelity only another incentive to her faithfulness. How weak we are!"

It may seem surprising that the Empress had not before known, what had hitherto been well known to all the upper classes of St. Petersburg—that Azra and the Signora Hurtaldi were one and the same person, and that Ivan had been her devoted admirer. Royal and Imperial personages, however, being in the habit of leading the conversation, and of eliciting rather than receiving information, it did so happen that the Czarina had been almost the only person, of any note in St. Petersburg, who was not thoroughly cognizant of these facts.

On the following afternoon the Empress was perfectly prepared to receive Azra; and it was with a heavy heart that the good-natured lady was so prepared. "He has deceived her: he has deceived me. These learned men are a shade worse even than the others. I suppose they get it from their books. Yet, in those books, the wretches, most times, make themselves out to be true-hearted."

Azra was announced; and the Empress received her most cordially.

Elizabeth had but little time to spare for interviews of this kind. Moreover, she looked forward to a rather painful scene; and, on that account alone, was anxious to get the interview over as quickly as possible. She at once commenced the conversation in her usual clear, decided, resonant voice.

"I know it all: I know what you have come for. The Signora Hurtaldi is no other than Azra the gypsy."

"Yes: Madam."

"And Azra the gypsy once said that she was the sister of Ivan de Biron?"

"Yes: Madam."

"And the Signora Hurtaldi is of the same mind as Azra the gypsy, and loves Ivan de Biron: for the folly of us women is infinite."

"Yes, and no; Madam." Azra timidly replied.

"And Ivan de Biron is as false to Azra as he has been to his Sovereign."

"No; Madam, no! Ivan de Biron is the truest of the true! I have been with him in sickness and in health; in poverty and in riches; but he never spoke of Your Majesty, even when he was resolved to fight for the Duchess Regent, otherwise than with the greatest respect. Ivan is incapable of ingratitude; and, after Your Majesty had taken him into your service, would have died rather than betray his Imperial Mistress. I would answer with my life for Ivan. They deceive you, Madam."

The Empress smiled. "Large as your knowledge is of Courts, my royal sister, I do not admit that you are conversant with all the state affairs of Our Empire."

"Ah! Madam, I know nothing of state affairs,

but I know something of Ivan de Biron, and I know that he is incapable of falsehood, or ingratitude."

"You speak as a lover, Signora," replied the Empress. "We women are always sure of the perfections of our lovers: but I fear your testimony would not carry much weight with Our Grand Chancellor. Is this Ivan then so very dear to you?"

Azra paused for a moment, and looked down upon the ground. "He does not say so, Madam."

"What is the mystery then, my child? Tell it me all, and tell it quickly. We would do you a service, but we have scant time to listen to a story, if it is to be told as it is told in Our courts of justice."

"Madam, I did love Ivan, and I do love Ivan—better," she added, after a pause, "than any one else in the world; but not with his kind of love, though I once thought it was so. But he would have me all to himself."

"They are all alike, all selfish;" said the Empress.

"I must quit the stage," said Azra, "I must give up that which is the life of lives to me."

The Empress had heard many strange things in the course of her eventful career, but it may be doubted whether she had ever heard anything that more astonished her than this last sentence of Azra's. She, herself, had often said, "that love was everything in this world: that there was nothing to be compared with it." She had often, too, thought and said, that she would have given up empire to be really loved. And here was this girl, who would not give up the pleasure of representing mimic sovereignty for the real blessing of being truly loved.

"I do not understand you ;" said the Empress. "This Ivan loves you ; and you love him ; and yet you cannot leave the stage for him."

"He does love me, or, at least, he thinks he does, but his real love was, and perhaps is, for the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff."

"More revelations !" exclaimed the Empress. "It seems that I know little of what goes on around me in my own Court."

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and a page entered and said, that the Grand Chancellor was in waiting to see Her Majesty by appointment.

"No ; no : not now. We cannot see him now. Let him wait ;" said the Empress.

It would be tedious to the reader to recount what is already so well known to him. Suffice it to say that the Empress, now deeply interested in this love affair, so different in its characteristics from anything of the kind she had known before, was quite oblivious, for the moment, of state affairs. By degrees, she elicited from Azra the whole story of Ivan's life as far as Azra knew it, beginning from that day when Ivan and his master, the Duke of Courland, had met the gypsies, up to the seizure and second banishment of Ivan to Siberia. Azra could not explain or justify the conduct attributed to Ivan, which the Empress so deeply blamed, in reference to the Lapouschin conspiracy. Azra could only declare, from her knowledge of his character, that it was impossible he could have joined in injurious talk against any one who had been so great a benefactress to him as the Czarina.

Elizabeth heard the whole story with great patience, pausing every now and then to reflect, for the moment, upon what she did hear. After-

wards, without signifying by a single word what impression the story had made upon her, she dismissed Azra decisively, but very graciously, leaving the great actress in supreme doubt as to what would be the result of the interview.

The Empress herself was in doubt. Her feelings against Ivan had been, and were, very bitter. His conduct had seemed to her such a signal instance of treachery, that she could not at once overcome her repugnance to him. After recounting the interview to her favourite, Mavra Schepelof, the only words she uttered—and she uttered them with a sigh—were, “It seems to me, my good Mavra, that neither poets, philosophers, nor men of the world, and these latter should know something, have ever known anything about the love of women. It is, I think, a mistake of nature to have paired us off so badly. You remember the Princess Marie Andréévna. I always thought that girl had met with some great disappointment. The face is not true to the mind, and will betray its secrets, let the mind be ever so resolute to keep its counsel.

“Bestuchef may come in now. No; stay. Have you ever thought, Mavra, that there may be a sex in souls? All the time that soft-looking, velvety-cheeked girl, to the outward eye so rich in woman’s charms, was telling her story, I thought how like she was to a man, who would sacrifice anything to an idea—but very little for a person. Yes, the Chancellor may come in. He, too, is one of those noble beings, as they think themselves, who would immolate us all, myself the first, to render sure some stroke of finely-tempered policy.”

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER III.

IVAN, WHEN ARRESTED, DESIRES HIS SERVANT KALYNCH TO PROCEED AT ONCE TO THE DUKE OF COURLAND AND INFORM HIM OF HIS FATE—THE DUKE APPLIES FOR LEAVE TO WRITE TO IVAN—THE LETTER SEEN BY THE EMPRESS AND THE GOVERNOR—KALYNCH ALLOWED TO BE THE BEARER, AND TO BE REINSTATED IN IVAN'S SERVICE.

IVAN, when he was arrested on the stage of the opera-house, did not imagine that he should have any opportunity of communicating the fact of his arrest to any of his dependants. The officer, however, who had arrested him, had gone first to his lodgings, to inquire for him there. The appearance there of an officer accompanied by three private soldiers, was sure, at that time, to awaken suspicion in any household, as to the fate of its master. The faithful Kalynch instantly conjectured what was the object of this inauspicious visit ; and he had the wit to follow the officer at a respectful distance. As Ivan and his captors entered the carriage which was to convey

them to Schlüsselburg, Kalynch contrived to approach it; and Ivan was able, unobserved, to whisper a few words to him. These words were: "Go and tell His Highness that I am perfectly innocent, whatever the charge may be."

Movement in Russia, from one place to another was not a very easy matter for a man in Kalynch's position; and it would have been almost impossible if he had been a serf. But being a freeman, and a Courlander, he could claim the right to dispose of himself; and the authorities acquiesced in his petition to be allowed to return to his former master.

On such an event as the exile of their master, the first thought of the members of Ivan's household was, "What will Kalynch say now?" And even Ivan himself astonished the government courier, who travelled in the same carriage with him, by exclaiming, grimly smiling as he said so, "What will dear old Kalynch say now?"

Kalynch, as it may be remembered, had foretold that a signal piece of good fortune was to befall his young master after the evil fortune of the rejection of his love by Azra. This was undoubted: it was the inevitable order of the march of events according to the Kalynch law. He, however, was the only person not disturbed by this apparent contradiction. Facts may be flexible, but theories are rigid. Kalynch now perceived that the rejection of Ivan's suit by Azra, was only a continuation of the good fortune which Ivan had met with in his favour at Court. "Blind must the man be," said Kalynch, "who did not perceive that." And the whole household were comforted. But it is to be feared that Ivan, not being made cognizant of this lucid explanation of the facts of the case, did not derive

equal comfort to that which had been administered to his household by the prophetic Kalynch.

It is almost needless to add that the metaphor of the comet was introduced. The nucleus was the favour at Court: the tail was the rejection of Ivan by one who was quite unworthy of him, as Kalynch now did not fail to perceive.

The Duke of Courland's affairs were in abeyance. It was still uncertain whether he would be reinstated in the possession of his Duchy, for which there were potent competitors. Moreover the Czarina, though very favourably disposed to the ex-Regent, remembering the kindness she had received from him in former days, had not ventured to bring him to Court, knowing full well how hateful his presence would be to many of those nobles whom she was anxious to conciliate. The poet may say that "Lightly vanishes from the sunlit earth the trace of human deeds,"* but not so from the hearts of those who have been injured by such deeds. And so it was not an unwise precaution on the part of the Empress to keep the Duke of Courland at a distance from St. Petersburg. The place of residence assigned to him was Jaroslaw.

His Highness was greatly dismayed by the intelligence which Kalynch brought to him. He had viewed the favour, which he supposed Ivan to retain with the Empress, as a means for himself of approaching her; and it was not without some satisfaction that he had hitherto thought that, at any rate, one member of his family, bearing his name, was able to hold his own at Court.

* "Leicht Verschwindet der Thäten Spur
Von der Sonnebeleuchteten Erde."—*Schiller*.

There was, however, one piece of intelligence brought by Kalynch which still more disturbed and distressed the Duke. This was the news, current now throughout St. Petersburg, that the Serbatoffs had been arrested and sent to Pelem. The Duke's feelings towards the Princess Marie were still those of the tenderest gratitude. He was wont to say to himself, that if he had known her earlier, he should have been a different man. Men are very fond of saying that if something had happened which did not happen, they should have been very different; and doubtless not only much happier, but much better than they have been.

The Duke asked leave to be allowed to write a letter to Ivan. This request was first addressed to the governor of Jaroslaw, was by him submitted to the Empress, and was granted—subject to the condition that the letter should be shown to the governor.

This letter contained, as might be expected, a severe objurcation of Ivan's conduct. The Duke was obliged to assume that Ivan had, in some way or other, been connected with the Lapouschin conspiracy. Very bitter were the Duke's reproaches upon this head, and very pleasing both to the governor and the Empress (for the letter was shown to her) were the terms in which the Duke spoke of Ivan's unaccountable ingratitude. Even in this official letter, the Duke, though speaking severely of Prince Serbatoff, assuming him too to have been one of the Lapouschin conspirators, contrived to impress upon Ivan that he should devote himself to the service of the Serbatoff family and pay them every possible attention.

The Empress was somewhat astonished at this

mention of the Serbatoffs. She knew full well the feud that had existed between the two houses and that the Prince had originally been banished by the Empress Anne, solely at the urgent request of the Duke of Courland. The Czarina, however, thought this kindness to the Serbatoff family was only another instance of the greatness of Biron's character, and of the improvement which had taken place in it by reason of his own sufferings in exile.

Kalynch, accompanied by a government courier, was permitted to be the bearer of this missive, and was, if it were allowed by the authorities at Pelem, to re-enter Ivan's service.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER IV.

THE REJOICINGS AT ST. PETERSBURG AFTER A VICTORY—THE EMPRESS ALONE IN HER PALACE—HER REMORSE AND SORROW AT THE BLOODSHED OCCASIONED BY THIS VICTORY—THE DUKE OF COURLAND SEEKS AN AUDIENCE OF HER MAJESTY.

It was a day of high rejoicing in St. Petersburg. The news of a great victory had arrived two days before; and this day was appointed for its celebration. Few capitals in the world were more fitted for representation of this kind than the capital of Russia—that larger Venice set in snow. Unlike most of the European cities of that period, the newly-built St. Petersburg had no tortuous streets and narrow alleys; and, whatever devices of adornment were adopted, could be widely seen—seen, too, for the most part, with the redoubled beauty of reflection in the glistening waters of the Neva.

In the morning, there had been a grand service at the Cathedral: in the afternoon, there had been

a great review in front of the Winter Palace. At both of these ceremonials the Empress had assisted; and the review had just concluded, as the evening came on. The illuminations had already commenced; and, from the windows of the Palace, the reflected lights of earthly origin gleamed brightly in the waters of the Neva—outshining far their pale prototypes, the stars.

It was a day of real festivity, in which every one of the Czarina's subjects partook, the national pride being excited to the uttermost. The victory, great in itself, had moreover this additional joy attending it, that it was unexpected: for the Russian forces had previously suffered a partial defeat.

One heart, and one alone, was supremely wretched; and its wretchedness lacked not the added misery of imperative concealment. The thorns must be turned inwards.

The Empress had come back from the review, and was alone in her own apartments. She had even dismissed the favourite, Mavra Schepelof. It was in the magnificent costume of a Russian sovereign that the Czarina had reviewed the troops. Suddenly she took off the crown, and threw it down upon a table, whence it rolled heavily upon the ground; and, at the same moment, she burst into an agony of tears.

"What have I done, what have we all done, that there should be such misery upon the earth, —and that too, of our own making! *Combien d'innocens ont perdu la vie.** Can they lay their blood upon me? I fear they can. And what a load it is to carry! And yet how oft my words

* The very words which she afterwards used in public, when lamenting over the victory of Cünersdorf.

for peace have been overborne by all these crafty statesmen who surround me.

"This will be no answer at the final day. Oh I am guilty—doubly, trebly guilty! Why did I ever take the burden of the Empire upon me? Why listen to that feather-headed fool, Lestocq?

"We are like insects, imprisoned in a room. They think they have power to wander thence, as they list, into the free air. No hindrance intervenes, as they fondly imagine; but when the poor bewildered creatures drive against the hard crystal, it holds them back as surely as if it were marble. So is it with us great ones. Who should control Elizabeth of Russia? And yet, were she really all-powerful, would there be any of these wars? She is only one of these poor insects battling against those seemingly easy outlets, in truth impassable for her."

The unhappy woman said no more for some time; but, sitting down at a table, with her head between her hands, looked out fixedly through a window which was opposite, and which commanded a full view of some of the most brilliant of the illuminations.

After a time, there arose a great clamour in the open square before the Palace, and in the surrounding streets. The Czarina understood what this clamour meant. It was that she should show herself to the assembled populace, and receive their final acclamations. Whatever her anguish might be, no thought of disappointing her subjects entered her brave mind. It was part of a sovereign's business, and it must be done. Hastily she took up the unwelcome crown, placed it upon her head, composed her features and her dress, not forgetting to look into one of the surrounding mirrors as she did so.

Then she stepped out upon the balcony, and with smiles, which were needless as they could not be seen from that distance, received the tumultuous plaudits of the people, bowing graciously as she did so.

When this had been repeated sufficiently, she again retired into the room, and again broke out into the direst lamentations. These were so loud that they were overheard by the favourite, who, though dismissed, had not gone further than the adjoining ante-chamber.

Mavra Schepelof really loved her Imperial mistress. She partially conjectured what the feelings of that mistress were. She could sympathize with her distress, but not with the tender feelings that caused it, for the favourite was a stateswoman, versed in intrigues, and deeply ambitious for Russia. The Czarina knew this—knew all that Mavra would say to comfort her—knew how unavailing it was, and that she herself was, for the moment, utterly alone in the world.

Her thoughts turned to her “dear brothers and sisters,” the other sovereigns of Europe. Did they feel as she did? Was there any sympathy to be found in them? No: she told herself: her present anguish would be inconceivable to the hard king whose armies she had conquered, and for whose soldiery, as well as for her own, her heart was bleeding.

“And if he could conceive my feelings, how he would despise them! The very mothers do not feel with me,” she said, “the mothers who have lost their children, for they are told that their sons have died for the honour of Russia, and their pride wrestles with and mostly overcomes their love. But I am the mother of them all, and

a wicked mother ; not as the world says, but as I say, and know, and feel, and shall, for ever, say and know, and feel. And all their glozing words bring no comfort to my soul."

This last utterance was so loud, and so full of anguish, that Mavra could restrain herself no longer. She knocked at the door, and quickly entered.

"I fear Your Majesty is not well ;" she said. "May I come in ?"

"No : I am not unwell, my dear : " said the Empress, in a gentle, mournful voice, "but I have much to do : " and, hereupon, she affected to busy herself with some papers that were upon the table. "I would rather be alone just now."

Mavra Schepelof did not venture to stay after this dismissal, but again retired to the ante-chamber.

With persons of Elizabeth's form and temperament, great agitation of mind is often suddenly cut short and benumbed by sleep ; and so it was with her on this occasion. After her last outburst of anger and vexation, and when Mavra Schepelof had left the room, the Empress suddenly fell forward on the table, and was lost in sleep.

Many praiseful sayings have been uttered of sleep, how it "knits up the ravelled sleeve of care," and the like ; but its exceeding graciousness is most discerned in this :—that it is nearly sure to change the current of our thoughts. Dreamland insists upon being quite another country to Earthland. If it were not so ; if, however fantastically, dreams ran on in the same groove as the severest and most urgent thoughts of the day, men's lives would be much shorter than they are.

Amid the tens of thousands whom the Empress had seen in her progress to and from the Cathedral, and during her review of the troops, one group of persons had riveted her attention. They had been standing near the steps of the cathedral. It was a family group of the poorer classes. The boys were in front of their parents. Two of them were about the ages of twelve and thirteen; and the Empress had noticed the tender way in which the elder boy kept an arm around the other's neck, the other being apparently a sickly child. It was not the first time the Empress had observed the affectionate ways and gestures of boys of this age to one another; and, as she passed along, bowing and smiling to the right and left, and particularly noticing this little family group, she thought had passed through her mind as to whether girls of that age were equally fond of one another, or, at least equally demonstrative in their affection.

This little episode of thought was almost the only one, which, as she afterwards said to Mavra Schepelof, had distracted her mind from the "load of torment"—such were her words—which had weighed upon her throughout that day.

A woman, desiring sympathy above all things, her loneliness had never been felt so cruelly by her as on that festal occasion.

The gracious angel of dreams, carefully eschewing all the miserable thoughts and images which had imbittered the Empress for those many weary hours, chose as a theme the loving aspect of the two little brothers, as they stood near to the steps of the cathedral.

In her dream the Empress wandered abou

beautiful gardens with her little nephew, the Czar Peter the II—the one who had come to the throne before Anne, and had died early from an attack of smallpox.

He had been five or six years younger than herself; and, with that habit of reasonable questioning, which never quite forsakes us even in sleep, she wondered how it was that he had suddenly grown so much taller than herself, as to put his arm round her neck, and how it was, too, that he seemed to take her for a boy—not so great a mistake, as the English ambassador would have said, if he had been the dream's interpreter.

But the dream was very sweet and pleasant, for she had always been very fond of her nephew; and, at the time of his accession, had rejoiced in there being a lineal male descendant of her father, Peter the Great, to take upon himself the Empire, and to free her from the duty of being ambitious—private life being what this wisely-intellectual woman had most desired.

She was in the midst of these happy thoughts—rather feelings though than thoughts—for, all the time, even when the dream was most intense and real, she was strangely conscious that she was the Empress Elizabeth of Russia, and wondered how this had come to pass,—when she was aroused by a knock at that door which led from the grand corridor into the apartment.

She was much astonished at this, for, as she had ascended the stairs, she had given the strictest orders to the Chamberlains that she was not to be disturbed. She, however, allowed the person who knocked at the door to enter. An elderly page, of the name of Vladimir, came in. He approached the table with some hesitation.

The Empress looked at him, with a look expressing astonishment and anger. "I thought, Vladimir," she said, "that I had desired to be undisturbed. Were you not aware of this?"

"Please your Majesty, I was; but I venture to think your Majesty will pardon me, when"—He did not finish the sentence; but, offering the Czarina a small packet, added:—"The person who gave me this, wishes to see your Majesty; and I did not dare to refuse to convey his message."

The Empress opened the packet. There was in it a little ring of small value. Her colour changed as she looked at this ring. Yet there was nothing very mysterious about it, no wonderful story connected with it. She had worn it, herself, when quite a girl, and when she was girlish enough to express her admiration of a beautiful sapphire ring, the first she had ever seen, which was worn by a young officer in the household of the Empress Anne, then only the Grand Duchess of Courland. This young man had been sent by her on a confidential mission to the Court of Russia. He had playfully suggested an exchange of rings, when the princess, after admiring his, had refused to accept it. To the exchange she had consented; and he had always worn this ring upon his little finger.

There was nothing very remarkable in this story, except that the young courtier's name was John Ernest de Biron, now Duke of Courland.

The Empress did not fail to show her ready wit, and presence of mind. She divined at once that the Duke of Courland was in the Palace. She knew that he had come there without her

permission, and that this step on his part might be fatal to him, if discovered by his enemies. She said to herself, "Vladimir has recognized him. He must be silenced first."

"Vladimir," she said, looking sternly at him, "you have disobeyed orders. I forgive you—forgive you freely; but on this condition only, that no one ever knows that you have disobeyed orders, and that this person has had audience of me. Go. Bring him, but remember that one careless word may be your ruin."

The page left the room. He soon after returned, bringing in with him the disguised Duke of Courland; and then withdrew.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER V.

THE DUKE OF COURLAND'S AUDIENCE.

"Is Your Highness mad?" were the first words which the Empress addressed to the Duke.

He made no answer; but knelt down and kissed the Czarina's hand. Her first thoughts, womanlike, was to see how he looked; and she was greatly astonished, almost shocked, at the change that was visible in him. "I should hardly have known him," was what she said to herself. "You do not answer my question," was what she uttered.

"I am not mad, Madam; but, perhaps, I am very foolish, for I know that I come at the risk of my life to ask something which I might have asked by letter. I wished to see Your Majesty once more. I am fortunate in having come upon an auspicious day."

"Auspicious!" exclaimed the Empress bitterly. "Auspicious—because fifteen thousand, seven hundred men clad in one colour, and

twenty five thousand men clad in another colour, have died upon the field, while the comrades of the fifteen thousand, undismayed by the loss of their friends, have stood their ground; and it is a great and glorious victory for them. 'The God of Battles,' so they fondly call him, has been duly thanked; and there is, as far as I know, but one heart that is miserable at all this carnage. But what is the use of moralizing to you—a statesman like the rest of them—who think but little of the slaughter of thousands of your fellows, so that the clause of a treaty may be worded a little more favourably."

"I am not here, Madam, to praise the policy of your ministers."

"Ah but, Courland, they say, and say with justice, that you were equally reckless of human life. Mayhap you have thought of these things in exile?"

"I have, Madam," replied the Duke, and these words were uttered in a melancholy tone that did not escape the Empress's attention. The generous woman would not press him any further. The same thought came to her that had occurred to her before—a thought very near the truth—that the Duke of Courland was an altered man, greatly refined and softened by adversity.

The Duke seemed lost in thought, and there was silence for a minute or two. It was broken by a question from the Empress. "You have come to ask me something—that is why everybody comes to me; for I venture to doubt, Duke," and here the Empress smiled, "whether the anxiety to see your Sovereign once again, was quite so potent as to cause you to run the risk of what Bestuchef and the other members of

the council would say to such a juvenile escapade."

The Duke smiled too; and said, "I am glad to see that the cares of Empire have not subdued the pleasant wit of the Princess Elizabeth, which we all used so much to delight in."

The Empress took no notice of the compliment; but simply asked:—"Is Jaroslaw so dull, so much more dull than Pelem, that the Duke of Courland cannot endure his sojourn there? Is the Governor unobservant of the Duke's dignity and pleasure? Our orders were, that he should be treated with the utmost respect. You know, Duke—no man better—that most people, even of failing memories in other respects, have long and accurate remembrance of injuries done to themselves. Without a word more, I cannot summon you to Court. Herein the statesmen are, for once, right. Your presence, otherwise most welcome to me, would endanger all my projects of conciliation. It cannot be—at any rate, not for the present."

"I know it:" replied the Duke, "much as I should have liked to have returned here, and to aid Your Majesty in Council, if such a boon might be permitted to me:—I know it cannot be."

"You come, then, about the Duchy," said the Empress. "This is a matter already before Our Council; and I may tell Your Highness, that there is one person in that Council who is your firm friend. Elizabeth does not forget any kindness which was shown to her when she, too, was powerless. We were always good friends, were we not, Duke?" These words, spoken in a most kindly and affectionate manner, tended greatly to reassure him.

"You would hardly think, Madam, how indifferent I am to all but your goodness in this matter of the Duchy. One must fight for one's children's rights; but I, myself, care no longer for power."

"What in the world then," said the Empress, somewhat emphatically, "does the man come here for? I might almost believe, as women are so apt to flatter themselves, that he does come to see his Sovereign."

"That is a great pleasure to him," replied the Duke, "but the object which is still nearer to his heart is to obtain Your Majesty's pardon for Ivan de Biron and the Serbatoffs."

"Ungrateful wretches all of them!" exclaimed the Czarina. "Do you know the story of your Ivan? How he fought against me: how I forgave him: how I employed him: how I trusted him: and how he rewarded me? It was by sitting at the table of my enemies, and commenting, the traitor! upon the conduct of his mistress. Slanderous comments, Duke, abominable calumnies!"

"Then the Serbatoffs. They, too, believe me Duke, were fully implicated in the Lapouschin conspiracy."

"Spies, Madam, are often incorrect in their intelligence. I ought to know that, if any man does. They must say something."

"I have been for hours waiting to gain admittance here—waiting until I could find some friend in the household."

"It would have been better, Duke, that you should not have found him."

"Well, Madam, as I waited, I looked at the young trees in the north corner of the square."

Your Majesty can see them from this window. I ordered them to be planted."

The Empress looked impatiently at the Duke. Then it crossed her mind that his troubles might have affected his brain, so irrelevant seemed this talk about the trees. She made no remark, however, and the Duke continued.

"They were tall young trees when they were planted. We took them from Or nienbaum."

The Empress became still more alarmed for the Duke's reason.

"Long wooden poles were driven in beside them, to which they were attached, as you see, by an iron ring and chain. This was, at first, a most needful support. But they have now outgrown the need. No one has thought of this. The iron rings have eaten into the trees; and will, if not at once removed, be the ruin of them."

"It shall be seen to, Duke," said the Czarina, "there is much about Our Court which requires such watchfulness as yours, ever attentive to the smallest as well as to the greatest things." This she said to soothe and please him, for she was more than ever convinced that his mind had become affected.

"Thank you, Madam; but it was not of the future of those trees that I was thinking most."

"What then?"

"I thought how those means of government which we at first employ—for an occasion when they may be needful, at length eat into the very heart of that which we seek to preserve, and become its ruin, not its support. These spies, ever present, ever active, with their endless mass of false or dubious intelligence, prove, in the end, as fatal to us, the rulers of men, as those

iron rings to the stunted trees I spoke of. Your Majesty now understands me. Such were my poor thoughts ere I encountered the good-hearted Vladimir, almost the only grateful person I have met with since my downfall."

"Your Highness," said the Czarina, "has become a great philosopher. I do not altogether deny the truth of your philosophy. My own conclusions are not far from yours as regards these same supports, which often become the greatest hindrances to sound growth. But sometimes, as you yourself admitted, they are useful to the governing powers."

"Dismiss the Empress," replied the Duke, "and let our great Elizabeth be, for the moment, the wise and witty woman of the world she used to be. Is it likely that Prince Serbatoff—that prince and paragon of courtiers—then in high favour—would connect himself with a band of obscure conspirators? Our Elizabeth, when princess, used to be a judge of character. Has the weight of the Crown Imperial dwarfed her powers of perception? Is it in the slightest degree probable that Prince Serbatoff was as guilty as your ministers choose to suppose?"

"If I am to drop the Empress, and become the woman of the world, may I ask what makes the Duke of Courland so anxious for the welfare of the Serbatoffs? It was not so in former days, I believe?"

"No: it was not," replied the Duke. "There is much in those former days, that, if my heart's blood could cancel it, should be cancelled."

The Empress reflected silently for a short time, and then said:—"I may as well at once be candid with Your Highness. I know the cause of your solicitude for the Serbatoffs. Your Ivan

loves, or did love, the Princess Marie; and she loves him."

The Duke drew back two or three paces, as if struck by a sudden blow; and then exclaimed:—"I knew nothing of this, Madam, nothing upon my soul. My regard for the Serbatoffs, my gratitude to the Princess Marie, was for myself alone. Your Majesty's spies do not tell you everything. My presence at Pelem was betrayed to the people. The wretched rabble surrounded me, and nearly tore me to pieces. By night the Princess Marie came to me, tended my wounds, soothed me, comforted me—and, indeed, it is to her I owe my life. If, Madam, you have ever felt any kindness for me—and as you truly said, we once were friends; and long ere this, as you well know, I would have placed the crown upon your head, had it been in my power to do so—befriend these wretched exiles. They are innocent. I would stake my life on that. But whether innocent or not, use sovereign power mercifully for once,—and restore them."

As the Duke uttered these words, a sudden pallor overspread his countenance. The Empress noticed it, rose from her own chair, brought it to him, and bade him be seated. The Duke obeyed. In truth the great fatigue he had endured in coming from Jaroslaw—some part of the journey he had walked or ridden on horseback, to avoid the questioning at the great towns—and the surprise, not unmixed with a feeling of jealousy and dismay, when he heard of the Princess Marie's attachment to Ivan—quite overcame him.

The Empress was in agonies, fearing that it should be necessary to call for assistance, and that all would then be betrayed. She watched him with great anxiety, until he recovered.

Then she said :—" My good Courland, it shall be as you wish. They shall all be recalled—even your Ivan, though the young man is not as faithful and true as his uncle. But now, summon up your courage, and prepare for your return. For God's sake let no one ever know of your absence from Jaroslaw."

The Empress returned to the table, took another chair, and immediately wrote a short letter to the Governor of Jaroslaw, enforcing silence upon him, if he should be aware of the absence of the Duke of Courland.

It was an instance of the practical nature of this great Sovereign that she thought whether money might be necessary for him. Hastily she went to a cabinet; took from it a number of gold pieces, and put them into his hand. He had again almost relapsed into unconsciousness. She called for Vladimir, the page; and when the Duke had at last recovered himself and his presence of mind, she entrusted him to the care of Vladimir, saying :—" Vladimir, you know all. You will go with him back to Jaroslaw. Here is my signet ring. This will ensure safe conduct throughout the journey. Meanwhile let no one enter." And, so saying, she left the apartment.

The Duke was in a short time sufficiently recovered to pursue his journey with Vladimir; and they reached Jaroslaw in safety. The autograph letter of the Empress secured the silence of the Governor; and this interview between the Duke of Courland and his sovereign remained a secret, known only to four persons.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER VI.

THE EMPRESS RECALLS THE SERBATOFFS AND IVAN DE BIRON FROM EXILE—THEIR JOURNEY TO ST. PETERSBURG—THE CONTINUED ESTRANGEMENT OF MARIE AND IVAN.

THE Empress saw no one more that night. She was invisible even to her favourite Mavra Schepelof. Strange to say, the depression of spirits from which she had suffered on hearing the news of the victory of her army—a victory so dearly purchased—was partly removed by the thought that, at any rate, she could do some one good work, and if she managed skilfully, could make some few people happy. How true it is that the fate and fortunes of those who are brought close to us, affect us more than the fate and fortunes of thousands, or tens of thousands, of those who are only units of humanity, unknown to us. There never was a more fond mother of her people than the Empress Elizabeth of Russia; but this private love affair, interesting

to her because she knew the persons concerned in it, served for the moment to distract her thoughts from the sufferings of that multitude of her subjects who had died on the field of battle, to enlarge her power and her renown. If, for the improvement of the world, any one thing could especially be desired, it would be that the powerful should have that sympathy for, and interest in, the distant masses of mankind—distant in station from them—which they have for those with whom they have only been brought into the slightest personal contact.

The Empress was true to her word. The Serbatoffs and Ivan de Biron were recalled from Pelem. According to private instructions from the Empress, the exiles were conducted by the same couriers, and attended by the same escort.

"The faithless man," she said to herself, "shall have full opportunity of converse with that true-hearted girl, the Princess Marie." Elizabeth, not free from the prejudices of her sex, laid all the blame upon Ivan, forgetting that it was impossible for him to conclude otherwise than that the Princess Marie had been faithless to him.

The time occupied by this journey was a very trying time both for Ivan and the Princess. Her pride, for she thought that her love was scorned, made her very cold in all her intercourse with him. His pride, for he thought that he had been most cruelly treated by her, made him equally cold to her. Prince Serbatoff bore the journey with great difficulty; and the two young people were necessarily in constant communication to provide for his comfort, and to make joint appeals to the couriers and to the escort

to slacken their speed, in order to render the sufferings of the Prince less injurious to him.

The narration of one trifling incident will do more than many words of description to convey a just impression of the terms on which Ivan and the Princess Marie were, during these painful days of travel from Pelem to St. Petersburg.

It was in the afternoon of a day during which Prince Serbatoff had shown signs of more than ordinary fatigue. The Princess Marie was much alarmed; and, at the last post-house, had, though reluctantly, communicated her alarm to Ivan. He then besought the Government couriers, and the captain of the escort to be allowed, for the next stage, to accompany the Prince in his carriage. They were at that time approaching the end of their journey, and had exchanged sledges for telegas. The principal Government courier had received instructions to deal humanely with the returning exiles; and, when made acquainted with the circumstances of the case, consented to the proposal.

During the last stage of that day which was to bring them to a large town at no great distance from St. Petersburg (it was most probably Josna) the Prince was certainly far more feeble than usual. In order to give him more ease of posture, Ivan and the Princess persuaded him to recline. In this position they had to support him; and, in doing so, their hands accidentally met. Each of them simultaneously withdrew the hand, as if it had touched the hand of an enemy. The poor Prince made an exclamation of pain from this sudden withdrawal of support. The telega, being a very rough mode of conveyance,

exposed him to a somewhat severe jolting. They both felt ashamed. They joined hands to ensure the prevention of a similar accident; but there was no fond pressure of the hands; and two servants, dutifully taking care of a master, could not have manifested more indifference for each other than did these two ardent lovers, for such they were, who clasped hands so firmly, but so unaffectionately. Each, too, avoided looking at the other; and each, with settled pride of heart, took care to make it understood by the other, that solicitude for the Prince was not to be made into a pretext for any friendly proximity, moral or physical, on the part of his supporters.

It was in the course of that stage, that they were witnesses of one of the most beautiful of any of Nature's multiform phenomena—an aspect of Nature which it is given to few people to behold. The cavalcade was entering a mountain gorge. On the right hand, and on the left, the mountains descended towards the road which they had to traverse. It had been raining previously for the last hour, and was raining still upon the sides of the mountains. But bright sunshine had come forth and illumined the whole of the long level road they had to travel. Then there appeared a perfect rainbow. Over all the roadway, in its central part, it was but an ordinary rainbow. On the sides of the mountains which enclosed the travellers, it was of gigantic extent; and it took in whole forests, from the base of the mountains to their summits, which it transformed into masses of red, yellow, and violet trees.

The escort involuntarily stopped; and, silently, each person regarded with wonder, and with

somewhat of superstitious awe, this grand spectacle, which was new to every one of them.

The Prince himself forgot his pain and his fatigue; withdrew from the support of Ivan and his Marie, and looked on as wonderingly as the rest of them. In a few minutes the rainbow vanished as suddenly as it had appeared; and the harsh voice of the government courier was heard, urging on the drivers to movement. The stern official was somewhat ashamed of himself for having allowed this brief interruption to their journey, for which there was no government authority.

Meanwhile, what were the thoughts of Ivan and the Princess Marie? Each thought how this brilliant phenomenon, and the gloom which followed it, told forth the sad story of their own lives.

There was their first love mirrored in all the brilliancy and in all the joy which made every aspect of nature beautiful for each of them. Then there was the sudden gloom which overspread all nature, and all life, when this transitory and vehement beauty had vanished. Each of them wished to sigh; but each suppressed the sigh, fearing that it might tell the other too much of sorrow and regret, and might betray those feelings which wounded pride forbade each to disclose.

The Prince sank back in the telega, and was again supported by the intertwined hands of his affectionate young friend and his loving daughter. But those hands, though they trembled, apparently under the weight of the good old Prince, did not betray to their owners the sadness and the desolation which were so well figured forth to each of them, by the sudden vanishing of the

brilliant and rare phenomenon which had, for so short a time, gladdened the beholders.

Ivan could not but admire the skilful tenderness of the Princess in regard to everything that concerned her father; and found himself often considering what an admirable wife such a tender daughter would prove, if, as he said to himself, the proud girl could love any one who was not dignified by long descent, and enriched by large possessions. But, as regards love, he had come to the firm conclusion that her love was of that well-ordered kind which requires station and riches to be added to the object of its affection, before it can condescend to be evoked. He said to himself, rather wittily, but very unjustly: "As in a good coat of arms there must be proper supporters; so, for the Princess Marie's love, there must stand on one side an heraldic animal, signifying rank, and, on the other side, another animal supporter signifying wealth."

Of all the errors that beset mankind, perhaps the greatest is, that most people imagine that others know what they know; and are thinking or acting in accordance with that knowledge. How great was this error in the present case! Ivan condemned Marie, unconsciously assuming that she should have known that he had put aside for ever his transient love, as he was pleased to call it, for the great singer Azra. The Princess Marie, on the other hand, unconsciously assumed that Ivan should know (how could his direct and honest nature imagine such a thing?) that she had only promoted his suit to Azra, from the highest motives, having come to the sad conclusion that their love (her own and his) was hopeless, and that she had but striven to gain for him some true love which it was denied for

her, alas! to give. "He ought to have seen how much I suffered in giving him up," she said to herself, "but men are so stupid."

Therein she was right; but how can it be expected that we denser mortals, perhaps more given to hard truth and distinctness than the other sex, can imagine all the delicacy, the depth of feeling, and the profoundness of self-sacrifice, of which that other sex is capable?

The benevolent intentions of the Empress were not successful; and this journey did not result in bringing the two lovers more in harmony together. It did result, though, in making each admire the other more, and more regret the hopelessness, in each case, of their affection. Ivan said to himself, "She is more loveable to me than ever; but further removed from me than ever." The Princess said to herself, "Ivan is even a greater man than I thought; but he is less my own than ever. I fear him more than I did. There is a certain darkness which has overspread his character; and I am consoled in thinking, though it is a bitter and a wicked consolation, that he will never love any woman, having, as I can see, such a profound contempt for all of us."

It was with such mistaken thoughts that they arrived at St. Petersburg.

As for the Prince, skilful as he was in diplomacy, and much as he had made it his business to master the characters of those he came in contact with, he could not understand either of these young persons. It was in vain that he praised each to the other. There was no response, or at best a very cold one; and he came to the conclusion, a very unwelcome one to most persons of his age, that he did not

understand the young people of the present time. The truth is, he had begun to wish that Ivan were his son-in-law. "It is very degrading, no doubt," he said to himself, "that a Serbatoff should desire to ally himself to an upstart Biron." But the good Prince was, after all, one of those persons who only use their diplomacy in reference to other people, and are true to themselves; and at last, he could not but acknowledge that he heartily, however degradingly, wished that these two young people would have the goodness, if only out of regard to him, to love one another, and become united in matrimony.

It would be unjust to the worldly training and principles of the Prince to say that no worldliness entered into these views. He reasoned thus:—There must be something very taking in Ivan, something appreciated by the Empress, for him to be recalled a second time from exile. "With my knowledge of Courts, and my skill in diplomacy, (and he is not above being taught by me) he might rise to the highest station in the State." It seemed to the veteran statesman that, having no hopes or expectations, with regard to his own advancement, he could throw all his energy, and all his skill, into making a worthy pupil, and in some sort a successor to himself, of his dear young friend, Ivan de Biron.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER VII.

THE EMPRESS SENDS FOR IVAN—THE INTERVIEW—
IVAN FINALLY RE-INSTATED IN THE EMPRESS'S
FAVOUR.

THE Empress was impatient for the arrival of the Serbatoffs and Ivan. She had in her mind a whole drama to play, and was scarcely less interested in it than she had been in the intrigues of Lestocq and La Chétardie, when they were about to gain for her the Empire. Then she had been tortured by remorseful doubts, and by anxious apprehensions. Now, whatever might be the result, there was no doubt or danger for herself.

After much thought she determined to send for Ivan first. It was for him, though, that she felt the least liking; and, if it had been his welfare alone that was at stake, she could hardly have taken much interest in the matter.

On the second day after his arrival, Ivan was sent for to the Palace.

Never was Elizabeth of Russia more resolved than on this occasion to conduct herself with the coldness and haughtiness of a Sovereign who had been deeply injured by the base ingratitude of an inferior.

Ivan had scarcely entered the room before she addressed him with these forbidding words.

"We have sent for you, Sir, because we wish that you should know that it is not from any merits or deserts of your own, that we have recalled you from an exile which was so justly your due. Your uncle has pleaded for you. My regard for his Highness has induced me to listen to his request, and, for the moment, to put aside the baseness of the person for whom he has made that request. On his account, we would even do more than that. We in high place are not always wise or circumspect in our likings; and we doubt not that you have deceived him, as you deceived us. You visited the Lapouschins, did you not?"

"I did, please Your Majesty," replied Ivan.

"You were present at those dinners where our conduct was so unjustly and traitorously impugned; and not one word did you, our faithful servitor, a member of our household, ennobled* by us, urge in answer to those calumnies directed against Our Imperial person. Was it not so?"

"Yes, Madam."

*It seems strange that the Empress never addressed him by his title of 'Baron,' but it is probable that she held that his nobility had been cancelled by his condemnation to exile as a traitor. One of the first things that an accused person seems to have suffered was to have his orders (if he had any) torn from his breast.

"It seems as if you held those calumnies to be true. Is it so?"

Ivan was standing near to the table at which the Empress was sitting, and in front of it, where she had motioned him to stand. On hearing this question, which, doubtless, she expected him to answer in the negative, he looked, not at her, but over her, towards the window which commanded the great square.

The Czarina, not unused to avail herself of all possible advantages in an interview, had placed herself in shadow, and the "traitorous Ivan" as she named him to herself, in full light.

On hearing Her Majesty's last question, it seemed to him as if a similar danger had come upon him, as that which he had encountered long ago, when his master, the Duke of Courland, questioned him as to his conduct as Prime Minister of Russia.

Ivan said to himself, "If I die for it, I will not speak falsely."

"Ivan Ivanovitch: "* said the Empress, "there is no inspiration to be found where you are looking for it. If the great duke were by your side, not even his practised skill as a courtier could suggest a judicious answer foreign from the truth. Say at once. 'I am a young man: I had not the courage to contradict those pleasant friends. Gratitude is feeble when it has to contend with the sayings of a wicked merry set of people, my companions and my elders. What is friendship, what is duty, when compared

* The Czarina made a singular mistake in so naming him. The Duke of Courland's name was also John (or Ivan); and she for the moment, seemed to assume that the Duke was Ivan de Biron's father.

with the wish to please the present company? We must go with the stream, though it should drag down all those whom we are most bound to honour and to serve.”

“No, Madam: No. ‘Ivan Ivanovitch,’ as you call him, fears not the ridicule of living man or woman; but he said nothing in answer to these spiteful people, because he feared to provoke their further spitefulness. He thought, indeed he knew, that much of what they said was true.”

As he uttered these bold words, he turned to the Empress, and looked at her. It was her turn to be embarrassed now; and the great lady, much unused to blushing, blushed and shivered slightly. She did not meet his steadfast gaze, but looked down upon the ground.

The kind-hearted Ivan repented him of what he had said. Suddenly he advanced towards her, knelt at her feet, and took her hand. “Great Sovereign,” he said, “for indeed you are a great sovereign, you would have the truth, and I have told it. You may condemn me to death; but can you ever forgive me? It is a little thing to say; but, at that moment, when those unkind and wicked people were speaking insolently of Your Majesty, could my death have stayed their talk, I would have given my life to stay it. And, Madam, it would have been no great sacrifice: for what is life to me!”

The Empress had conquered her first feeling of wrath. He still held her left hand as he knelt before her. Almost unconscious of what she was doing, she laid her right hand for a moment or two upon his head. Many thoughts passed through her mind while she did so. Here was a true man: how different a man from any of her transient and unworthy lovers! What

would it not have been to have gained the love of this man! She felt as if she could have loved such a one, if only for his truthfulness. And then she thought, for this great woman was one of the most unselfish of womankind, of his private misery, which now was not unknown to her.

"Rise, Ivan," she said, "do not condemn me. There is nothing worth living for, as I often say, but love; and even the semblance of it has been very dear, too dear, to me. I forgive you for what you have said. The water-carriers in the streets say the same, I doubt not. But should you have said it?"

"No," replied Ivan softly.

The Empress was silent for a few moments. She strove to dismiss entirely her own mortification from her mind, and to think only of how she could best weave into some happy form the tangled skeins of Ivan and the Princess Marie's love, which lay before her. She thus began.

"You men are great fools, Ivan Ivanovitch; and in the greatest affairs the greatest fools. You know the Princess Marie Serbatoff?"

Ivan drew himself up proudly, and answered: "Yes, Madam, I have that honour."

"We hardly know," continued the Empress, smiling, "why we should speak of her. But the story of the girl's life might interest you. You travelled with her, we believe, from Pelem?"

"Yes, Madam."

"Well: she had been in exile before. There was a youth, somewhat obscure at that time, and, not from his obscurity alone, unworthy of her love. But the maiden loved him. The hearts of maidens are not directed by the dictates of pure reason. Sir, a more true-hearted girl than this

Princess lives not in the world. She saw, or thought she saw, that this love of hers could come to no good result for the man she loved. Her father and a near kinsman of her lover's were deadly enemies. Then, (could you but imagine the fond devotion of us women, but this is far from you) she thought she could secure his happiness by another love : that of some actress, if I mistake not. The Princess thought, and, poor girl, was not greatly in error there, that the loves of men are somewhat transferable. And so it proved. It is now your turn, Ivan Ivanovitch, to look down upon the ground, and to feel some of the shame which, hard-hearted man, you have just made another feel."

After a moment, Ivan said : "Your Majesty's quick wit was well known to me ; but I had not hitherto been favoured by hearing a love story from the Czarina's lips. Perhaps you thought that such stories would not be relished by one whom, in happier days, you were wont to call 'your serious scholar.' If I may venture to say so, the story smacks somewhat of fable."

"By God, Sir!" (The daughter of Peter the Great was wont to use some of the strong language of her father) "by God, Sir! it is all true. It may be from our own knowledge of our own sex, that We have told more of the maiden's feelings than the evidence before us strictly warrants ; but what We have said, We feel, We know, to be true. The poets and the dramatists fable of us who tread the heights of this world. They are pleased to enlighten mankind about our inmost thoughts and feelings ; and, sometimes, even they are right ; but my intelligence is sure—bare facts with nothing of dramatic skill thrown in to weave a pretty story. That smile

of yours is still the protest of an unbeliever. On this day week come hither at this same hour of the day, when further assurance shall be given to you. But stay: supposing that the story be no fable, what think you should be the feelings of the recreant lover?"

"If I know anything of him, Madam, they would be those of utter devotion to the maiden whom he first courted in the wood of Pelem."

"We said nothing, Sir, about a wood. Who is it now that is adding circumstances, false mayhap, to Our simple story? If you know the young man, Ivan, tell him from me, that the most precious thing this world has to give is the real love of such a maiden as this heroine of my story.

"Have you nothing to ask? It seems We have given audience to a phantom—not to a human being—when nothing is asked of Us. We must, then, ask for you thus:

"'Gracious Madam, I listened silently to bitter censure of your conduct: I—a member of your household, and somewhat, perhaps, indebted to you—listened silently because I felt that the censure was just; and, having told you this, I wish to be re-instated in your household, and think I have abundant claim to be so.' That is what you should say, did not some foolish touch of modesty prevent you.

"To the which saying, We reply, 'Your great deserts are recognised.' Nay, without further jesting, Ivan de Biron, a place shall be found for my good, honest, 'serious scholar.'"

Ivan knelt and kissed the Empress's hand. She added. "Our Chancellor tells us daily that our Treasury is lean and poverty-stricken. Poorer it will still become if we are to bestow the

offices of exiles upon new men; and, afterwards, are to find new offices for exiles on their return. Even wealthy Britain could hardly bear such demands upon her Treasury; but for once it must be so. You are again Our *faithful* servant."

The love of polished sarcasm which was inherent in this great Princess made her accentuate the word 'faithful;' but her looks were most kind and encouraging. She slightly bowed, signifying that the audience was over, and Ivan de Biron accordingly withdrew.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE EMPRESS'S PLAN FOR THE WELFARE OF IVAN DE
BIRON AND THE PRINCESS MARIE—THE EMPRESS
SENDS FOR NARISKOFF.

THE Empress Elizabeth's education had been of a very uncertain and scrambling kind. She had been taught several languages ; she had acquired several accomplishments : but her course of reading had been very much left to herself. She had read many of the tragedies and comedies written in that age ; and in them, as a regular rule, were to be found some persons of inferior station in whom the hero and heroine unreservedly confided. The Czarina believed that this was the natural course of things ; and indeed it is probable that people in those days did confide much more to their inferiors in station, and certainly talked much more openly of their loves and their hatreds, than any persons, in this reserved age, are wont to do.

The Empress had naturally conjectured that

there must be people at Pelem who would be cognizant of all those matters of which she was anxious to be informed, in order to fulfil her benevolent intentions towards the two lovers. She had accordingly given orders that any especial friend of the Princess Marie, or of Ivan de Biron, should be sent back to St. Petersburg, not in their company, but as shortly afterwards as might be.

The authorities at Pelem had not been able to ascertain that the Princess had any friend; but there was no doubt that Ivan de Biron had an intimate friend in Nariskoff, and he was therefore sent to St. Petersburg, to await the orders of the Empress.

In the course of the week that was to elapse between the interview which the Empress had given to Ivan and the succeeding interview which she had promised to him, she sent for this man Nariskoff. She was well aware of his reputation for satire, and was, on that account, by no means favourably disposed towards him.

Nariskoff himself was in high glee at being thus sent for; and, with his usual conceit, was quite prepared to give the Empress whatever benefit as regards State affairs was to be derived from his superior wisdom.

The Empress received him very coldly; and, with her usual abruptness, led at once to the subject of the interview.

"You have long been acquainted, Sir, with Ivan de Biron, an exile who has lately been recalled from Pelem. I am desirous of knowing anything you can tell me of this young man's character and conduct."

"He is a man of moderate abilities, please Your Majesty, but honest, and capable of taking

good advice. I have myself often instructed him as regards his conduct to Your Majesty. I can answer for his faith and honesty as I could for my own."

"Sir; if you can do no more than that, your testimony is of little value to him. We know you well; we are fully informed of the gracious and truthful sayings, as regards ourselves, with which you were wont to repay the company at Madame Lapouschin's, for your entertainment there."

Nariskoff's sagacity was not to be found at fault on an occasion like the present. He could be as truthful, from policy, as Ivan was from the innate and supreme honesty of his character. Nariskoff had the audacity thus to reply. "Madam, if it had been the Czarina's fate, as it has been mine, to live upon her wits for many a year, she would not have been scrupulous as to what she said of friend or foe, so that she found her sayings gained favour with those who fed and clothed her. We people of superior wit, when Fortune has not been kind to us, must live upon the follies of our weaker brethren."

The Empress paused for a moment, hesitating whether she should be indignant at the presumption of the man, or take his bold speech in a lighter spirit. The latter alternative prevailed, and she indulged in an outburst of laughter. "I have been witness of some audacity in my time," she said, "but none like that of yours, my friend. Treason then is a jest—the duty to one's sovereign to be postponed to any opportunity of causing laughter in a company of traitors?"

"I did not say that, please Your Majesty; I only intimated that one must live, and not be too

scrupulous as to the mode of gaining one's living."

"Keep to the subject for which We sent for you, Sir. We wish to know more about your friend and companion, Ivan de Biron."

"Well, Madam, he is a good youth with a somewhat warped and bewildered mind. He is insane enough at times to speak evil things, even against women."

"Ourselves for instance!" said the Empress sharply.

Nariskoff acted as the confidant in a play, fulfilling the character which Elizabeth had imagined for him; and, accordingly, after some doubt as to whether truth or falsehood would be most expedient, adopted the common form, and lied: "Oh! no, Madam, Ivan never ventured to speak ill of Your Majesty. The Czarina was an exception to all other women."

"This is a falsehood, Sir: your hesitation showed it to be so. And if the true-hearted young man were here, he would own that, in his conversations with you, when he spoke against women in general, Elizabeth of Russia was by no means a distinguished exception."

Nariskoff, with his ready tact, appreciated at once the necessities of his position, and resolved to tell no more falsehoods. "I cannot say, Madam, now that you have quickened my memory, that even his Empress was entirely exempted from blame."

"We now, Sir, understand one another better," said the Empress. "When men talk this idle talk about their hatred for all women, it merely means, that there is some one woman whom they love very much; but who does not seem fully to appreciate their especial merits."

Is it not so? We see you are a humourist, and one who knows somewhat of human life, and of the strange ways of human beings. We have but little time for further converse; and We would hear forthwith, in the fewest words, what you can tell us. You know the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff; she was also at Pelem?"

Nariskoff replied, not without his accustomed conceit:—"Your Majesty, and my poor self, are persons of the world. I could have wished that we had been earlier acquainted with one another."

The Empress again laughed heartily. "Go on, man," she said, "I have seldom met with one so largely endowed with impudence; but he who can give intelligence of any kind, must give it in his own way, and is, for the moment, the superior. We await, respectfully, for whatever information you may be pleased to give us."

"Ivan is a learned man, Madam; but learning does not go far to instruct us when we are in that state of mind in which all the wisdom of the world is valueless. He thinks he does not love the Princess Marie, but he has never ceased to love her. I divine this from the fact, that he always spoke more bitterly of her than of any other woman, Your gracious Majesty not excepted. And she loves him. And they are two simple fools wandering about, blindfold, in a maze, and not likely ever to meet, or to understand one another, unless some sensible person, such as Your Majesty or myself, should bring their two foolish selves together, and take off the bandages from their eyes."

Nariskoff thought that he might now say a word or two for himself, on his own interests.

He had no idea of sinking the character of suitor in that of witness. He availed himself of an opportunity of silence, while the Czarina was reflecting what question she should ask him next.

"There is no greater proof of wisdom in a man, please Your Majesty, than that he should know his own value. When you find that a man is unsuccessful, it is merely that he has not understood his own value, or has not understood it early enough, or has not, from the denseness of those around him, been able to persuade them of this value in himself. That latter difficulty has at length been removed from me, now that I have met with a great personage who can understand my merits."

"Yes," said the Empress, "you would make an admirable spy."

"Spy is a hard word, Madam. Would you allow me to substitute the phrase 'observant philosopher'?"

"So be it then," replied the Empress: "words are of little moment. I say, then, that you would make an admirable 'observant philosopher.'"

"I ever saw, Madam, that these Lapouschins were hastening to destruction: but what could I do? They were the only people who fed me. Has Your Majesty ever been hungry for a whole day long?"

"We cannot say, Sir, that we have had that experience, so necessary, it appears, to the making of an 'observant philosopher.'"

"That Madame Lapouschin—I never liked her—deserved the fate she met with."

"Base man, wretch—ungrateful villain!" exclaimed the Empress, starting from her chair. "She did *not* deserve it. Oh! my God," she

muttered, as she walked up and down the room in a transport of anguish; "is this for ever to come up against me?" Then, recollecting herself, and considering how she must never own, at least to such a man, that her government had been in any instance wrong, she added hastily, "Yes, yes, she did deserve it; but you will understand, Sir, that one woman's heart bleeds for another's torments; and her death was never intended. But what is it that We were speaking about?"

The Empress, in her agony of remorse, had really forgotten the subject of the interview; and it was with difficulty that she brought back her mind to the matter at issue. Then she exclaimed:—"This Ivan, and the Princess Marie: how know you, Sir, that this early and immature attachment still prevails?"

Nariskoff, whom this outburst had greatly frightened, replied, in somewhat hesitating words:—"All other persons wear their hearts inside their garments; but lovers on their outward breasts; and every man of sense can read what these hearts tell him. I had many walks in the wood at Pelem; (Pelem, Your Majesty, is not the loveliest spot on this Earth's surface;) and both the Princess and this innocent youth are as fond of one another as—"

"You need not finish your sentence, Sir: We care not for fine-drawn similes. Suffice it to say, they love as two such noble hearts must love. I should not, however, have thought that the delicate Princess would have chosen for her confidant such an 'observant philosopher' as yourself."

"Nor did she, Madam. But I, myself, have

been in love ere now. Base as I am ; 'wretch,' as Your Majesty was pleased to call me, I have not always been so."

"Forgive me ; Sir. You knew not how nearly you touched Us, when you spoke of the fate of Madame Lapouschin."

Poor Nariskoff was greatly moved. The recollection of his former days came back upon him. "Yes, Madam ;" he exclaimed, and tears rolled down his cheeks while he uttered these words, "I was not once a 'wretch.' I was rich : I had serfs : I was a philanthropist and a fool."

The Empress was silent while she recalled to her mind the information which she had ordered to be given to her of Nariskoff's former life and circumstances. Then, advancing towards him, she said with that gracious manner which no one could more aptly and suddenly evoke:—"Yes, we know it all, and there is a kindred feeling between us. I, too, feel for these serfs, and the day will come—" Here she stopped abruptly. "You shall be cared for. Put aside the thought for yourself, for your own fortunes, and be the man you once were. It shall not be said that in Elizabeth's reign a man shall suffer for having the same designs that are her own. But silence about that."

The Empress made a great effort to recover her composure, and to turn the conversation into other channels. She added:—"The Princess Marie is still very beautiful, is she not ?"

Nariskoff, with a foolish notion that he had, that it was not advisable to praise one woman's beauty to another, replied:—"Well, for a slender woman she is passable, but I would not, myself, trust to those straight eyebrows, and those eyes which can look so fiercely. Ivan,

however, is a youth who can hold his own. There will be battles, and no one can say who will be the victor."

The Empress smiled, and said: "In such a contest, not even your sagacity, Sir, can tell what will be the result. It is enough: you may go; and take care that not a word of what you have said to Us be known to the Princess Marie, or to Ivan de Biron."

Nariskoff was about to withdraw, when the Empress retained him with a sign, and asked him the following question.

"That actress?"

Nariskoff merely shook his head, and said: "Nothing in that, Your Majesty. We affectionate souls must think we are loving somebody; and from the greatest we decline to the lowest, by way of contrast."

"Not the lowest, Sir: a nobler person than our prima donna does not live." The Empress signed to Nariskoff to withdraw, and then uttered these words: "Not only the nobler but the wiser of the two; and would that I could follow her example, and love the art of kingcraft more than any of these men, so unworthy of my love. She is the greatest who least condescends to them."

Thus did this great Empress contradict her former sayings, in which she had placed love as the highest boon of life.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER IX.

THE SERBATOFFS, IVAN, AZRA, AND NARISKOFF ARE ORDERED TO ASSEMBLE IN THE STATE ROOM OF THE WINTER PALACE—THE OBJECT OF THE EMPRESS IN THUS ASSEMBLING THEM—ITS FAILURE.

IN a week's time after the interview between the Empress and Ivan de Biron, there were assembled in a State Room of the Winter Palace, several persons who did not seem to be in very pleasant relation to one another. This room was very large and very gorgeously furnished; but it had that cold look which such great rooms for reception mostly have, and which no splendour of decoration can remove. The want of constant habitation makes itself felt in the State rooms of Palaces, as in the parlours of those houses in which the family do not live, but only receive company.

Prince Serbatoff and his daughter were there, as also Ivan de Biron, Nariskoff and Azra. They stood, for the greater part of the time, in

two separate groups. The Prince and his daughter were stationed near one window of the room; Ivan de Biron and Nariskoff at another; while Azra, occasionally moved from one party to another.

There was also another person in the room, a stranger to them all, who never spoke to any of them. He was dressed entirely in black; and various conjectures were made by each of the other persons as to the object of his presence there. The Prince thought he was a spy; and accordingly took care to utter nothing but the most trivial remarks, and even made them for the most part in a whisper. The Princess Marie and Nariskoff thought that he was an officer of the Household, stationed there on all occasions of reception. Ivan thought he was some secretary; and was confirmed in that thought by observing that this man stood near a little table on which there were the materials for writing. Ivan concluded that there were certain formalities to be gone through when men of note were recalled from exile; and that the man in black was the proper officer to record such proceedings.

True it was, as he said to himself, that there had been nothing of the kind on my first recall, "but then I was so insignificant, and doubtless this ceremony is chiefly for the Prince."

Azra, from her familiarity with certain situations on the stage, rightly conjectured who this man was, but did not impart her conjecture to the rest of the company. The meeting between her and Ivan had not been without embarrassment—especially on his part; but, upon the whole, it had not been unfriendly, though somewhat constrained and cold.

On their entrance into the room, and they

had all arrived about the same time, the usual greetings had taken place. Ivan had inquired after the health of his late fellow-travellers; and they had courteously expressed, (the Prince with much warmth, the Princess with nothing warmer than courtesy demanded) their great obligations to him for his kind attentions throughout the journey from Pelem to St. Petersburg. There then ensued a considerable period of waiting, which was felt to be very awkward by all the persons present. Evening began to come on, and the large grand room to look somewhat gloomy.

During this time of waiting, one thought crossed the minds of all the persons present who had known Nariskoff. There was a change in him—something almost indefinable, but yet a very distinct and assured change. It was not that his dress was far less careless than usual, but the manner and the bearing of the man had altered. There was an absence of that recklessness and flippancy which had, for many years, been characteristic of him. They did not know what effect a gleam of good fortune is capable of producing on such a mind. Prosperity and adversity make great changes—in the long run, equal changes; but very different in point of rapidity. Adversity gnaws away at the character, altering it gradually, but surely. The Heaven of Prosperity makes most men fit to enter it at once.

The two persons in the room who were the least embarrassed, were Nariskoff and Azra; and they talked together occasionally with something like ease and pleasure in their conversation.

Suddenly there was a rustling noise heard in the corridor; and the Empress Elizabeth en-

tered, preceded by two chamberlains and followed by Mavra Schepelof and another lady in waiting. The Empress was magnificently attired, for she had just come from another reception, that of the new Austrian Ambassador. This had made her much later than she intended to have been; and, judging from her countenance, the reception had not been a particularly pleasant one. There were subjects of discussion at that time between the two Courts, not by any means of a friendly nature, which had been alluded to in the course of the interview with the Ambassador.

The Empress had entered the room with even more than her usual rapidity of movement, which, as is well known, always caused great difficulty to those who had to precede and follow her, in managing their pace with proper dignity, and yet with the requisite speed.*

She bowed slightly in answer to the somewhat elaborate genuflections of the occupants of the room; uttered a few words which were indistinctly heard, mentioning the cause of her detention; and then went at once to the window near which Prince Serbatoff was standing. The Princess Marie, who was by his side, immediately withdrew to a short distance. The Empress remained for a few minutes in earnest conversation with the Prince. This was carried on in subdued tones; and the other persons in the room could only discern, from the Prince's looks and gestures, that what the Empress said, caused him, at first, great astonishment, and then apparently great pleasure.

* Marshal Münnich says:—*Pleine de santé et de vivacité, elle marchoit d'un pas si leste, que les dames surtout avoient de la peine à la suivre.*

Leaving him, the Empress strode to the table near which the man in black was standing. She then beckoned the Princess Marie and Ivan to come near to her. They obeyed: when at once, without any further preliminaries, the Czarina said loudly and distinctly. "My children, We know your great affection for each other—an affection long tried, and somewhat sorely tried, (here she smiled graciously) by faults and mistakes on each side—the man of course being most in fault. But now these follies are over, happily over, and We intend to give ourselves the pleasure of witnessing the civil contract of marriage between Baron Ivan de Biron and the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff. You will, first, Sir," said she, turning to the notary, "state the consent of his Highness the Duke of Courland (thereupon she handed the notary a paper), Ivan de Biron's uncle, and that of Prince Serbatoff, the Princess Marie's father, to this contract. Ourselves and Mavra Schepelof will be the witnesses."

Despotic sovereigns live sometimes in a strange world of their own, and may have but little knowledge of the world outside those sacred precincts. But, then, such sovereigns have generally been born in the purple and to the purple, whereas Elizabeth of Russia had passed a large part of her life in comparative freedom from sovereignty, or the hope of sovereignty.

This strange and abrupt proceeding, therefore, of hers was a great astonishment to all who were witnesses of it, or who afterwards heard of it. Every one, cognizant of the circumstances, would have expected that the Empress, having graciously made this marriage an object very

dear to her, and having conducted the previous negotiations, if so they may be called, with much feminine skill and tact, would have adopted some artistic plan for the conclusion of the affair. It might have been only the common one of making one lover confess his or her love, while the other was concealed to hear the confession. Mavra Schepelof had indeed suggested some such plan; but the Czarina had indignantly put it aside. The Empress's father Peter the Great, had insisted upon unwilling marriages being made,—so had her aunt, the Empress Anne. It was too ridiculous to suppose that she, the Czarina, could not make one which was ardently desired by both the persons concerned, as she well knew. "We will have no more of this nonsense, Mavra," she had said: "not even in Marivaux's provoking novels have two lovers gone through more varieties of ill-fortune, before the end of the third volume, than these two children have."

If the by-standers, and those who afterwards heard the story, were astonished at this strange proceeding so devoid of tact, much more astonished were those two persons who were directly interested. And not only astonished, but disgusted. Each thought that this was a plan made without the knowledge of the other, to effect a union which was not acceptable to that other. The pride and generosity of each of them rose indignantly to repel such an unwelcome and enforced conclusion. The Empress turned from one to the other; and could not fail to see in their countenances the most marked signs of disapproval, and even of determined refusal.

"Come forward," she said, imperiously, to both

of them. Ivan did not move; but the Princess did approach the Empress; and, in low and faltering accents, implored Her Majesty to desist from her design. The Princess then rose, and retired to the place where she had previously been standing. Ivan then approached, and, kneeling to the Empress, urged a similar request. "Anything but this, Madam," he said. "I am your servant, indebted to you for life and liberty and fortune; but spare me this humiliation."

The Empress turned from him abruptly, leaving him still kneeling.

The urgent, weighty, resounding wave of despotism, like its prototype, breaks upon the shore, reducing almost all the bodies it meets with to smoothness and roundness; but there are some few natures, as there are some few crystals, of such hardness, that they retain somewhat of their original angularity even under the constant action of this imperious and almost all-subduing wave. Ivan and the Princess Marie were of this nature; and no peril of despotic wrath could make them behave untruly to themselves.

The peril, in sooth, was great. The Empress paced rapidly up and down the long apartment; and, to Nariskoff's imaginative mind, as he afterwards said, she was like a ship of war passing up and down some broad estuary in an enemy's country, and firing terrible missiles on either side.

The simile was not altogether inappropriate; for, as the Empress paced the room, whenever she approached one of the reluctant persons, she addressed to them some hard, indignant, and fragmentary speech; sometimes in words ap-

parently irrelevant, but which were well understood by Ivan and the Princess Marie.

To Ivan, she said, in one of these fiery outbursts: "You may well say that the world is a mass of ill-digested folly:" and again. "You look as foolishly self-conscious and unhappy as an ill-dressed woman at a feast."

To the Princess Marie, she said: "What has been the use of all your childish comedy—providing, forsooth, another love for him? Is this silly play to have no fifth act?" And again, "You are mad, child; and it is a madness that will end in nothing but misery for you."

Once the Empress stopped suddenly in her impetuous movement; beckoned Mavra to come to her; and sent her for the captain of the guard. That judicious lady obeyed her imperious mistress; but took as long a time as she dared to take, in doing so; and when she returned in company with that important and much dreaded officer, he stood at the entrance of the door, but did not receive any orders from Her Majesty.

By that time the Empress had become aware of the absurdity of the scene. Her outbursts of rage were generally as brief as they were violent; and her main idea now was to see how she could, with least loss of dignity, put an end to these infructuous proceedings. She made no more indignant comments to Ivan, or to the Princess Marie. She even forced herself to treat the matter jestingly; and smiling said, half gaily, but with a certain bitterness accompanying the forced gaiety, "You may go, you may all go. Our time is too precious to be wasted upon fools."

They all began to troop off in an embarrassed and dejected manner. No one but the old courtier, Prince Serbatoff, attempted to say another word to her; and, as he approached to do so, she waved him off, merely saying. "It seems, Prince, that filial duty has little influence in your family!"

Nariskoff, who had meant to say his say, and would have said it, if he had not in these few days become a much more prudent, if not a wiser man, observing the rebuff given to the Prince, judiciously refrained, and went his way in silence.

The only person whom the Empress retained for a minute or two, was Azra; and to her she said with some severity of tone; "Are you sure you have not deceived us?"

"I am sure, Madam," was Azra's reply, "more sure than ever, to-day." She also, bowing, then withdrew.

The Empress looked round; and then signified to her chamberlains, and to all the others, with the exception of Mavra Schepelof, that their duties for the day were ended. Putting her arm round Mavra she said in a melancholy tone. "You are very wise, Mavra. I wonder you consent to live with such a weak-minded person as I am. The wisdom of wisdom is to understand fools; and I can see that you can do that far better than I can. You were right. There should have been some pretty ending for this play. We should have taken a lesson from the mimic queen, Azra."

So saying, she went from the state room to her private apartments, secretly determined never again to meddle with other people's love affairs.

The only further step which the Empress took, was to send a messenger to the Duke of Courland at Jaroslaw, informing him of the ill-success of her endeavour to promote the marriage of his nephew with the Princess Marie Andréevna.

It would be looking too curiously into a human heart to say, whether the Duke felt more pain, or pleasure, at this announcement. The baser motives have, for a time, great power even over the noblest minds. The Duke had come to a conclusion, in which he was entirely wrong, that the Princess Marie had served and succoured him, only from the love which she bore to Ivan—a love first made known to His Highness in his secret interview with the Czarina. The Duke's consent to the marriage, which had been requested by the Empress, in previous correspondence with him, had not been given without some pangs of regret. Still he was a wise man, and had by this time learnt to accommodate himself to what was inevitable. Moreover, he said to himself. "Better with Ivan than with anybody else; and I can bear it better. He is very loveable. There is a likeness, too, between us which she must have seen."

So the Duke gave his consent; but it is to be feared that he bore with great equanimity the ill-success of the Empress in this matter; and, perhaps, it might not be too much to say, that he felt it was a kind of reprieve, giving him time to reconcile himself to that which he thought must happen sooner or later.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER X.

IVAN'S DIARY DURING HIS EXILE—EXTRACTS THEREFROM.

THE Empress, in the course of her stormy outbreak, on the refusal of the Princess Marie and Ivan to be then and there united in marriage, uttered some words which were not intelligible to the rest of the company, but were fully understood by Ivan de Biron.

When he was recalled from his second term of exile, his papers were seized by the authorities at Pelem, and transmitted to the Empress for her perusal. In these papers there was much to be found which showed what he had been thinking of during those dull and melancholy moments which he passed in complete solitude. Exile gave a great opportunity for thinking. Men thought then who had never thought before. Ivan's condition, during this second time of exile, was very favourable to thought. It has been said that under Elizabeth more indulgence had

been granted to exiles than had been the case under previous reigns : and, at any rate, Ivan had been freed from those household cares and labours, which either for the Duke his master, or for the Serbatoff family, he had been wont to exercise during his first term of exile. Moreover, the many sufferings and disasters he had undergone in the interval, had rendered him a much more thoughtful man. Having no one to confide in, for his thoughts were such as he could not entrust to the sarcastic Nariskoff, he was fain to confide them to paper, and he kept a diary.

This diary had furnished the Empress with a fresh insight into his character. The course of his thinking was manifest. It was very crude : it was very sad : it betrayed the feelings of one who, for the first time, began to think deeply and sorrowfully of his own condition, and of the condition of the world. Some extracts from this diary may serve to enlighten others, as they served to enlighten the Empress respecting the nature of a remarkable man—remarkable not so much for force of intellect, as for extreme sincerity and clearness of apprehension. They are as follows.

“ What does it all mean ? What does it all tend to ? If one could discern any purpose, one would be satisfied with all this misery : but the thought will come upon me, though I try to drive it away—why should it not all have been left alone ? What is the good of creation ?

“ All men are like an army marching through a hideous country, beset with every evil that can expend itself upon them. Their march is traceable by the dead bodies they leave upon the route. What do they march against ? Where is the possible conquest ? What, the possible victory ?

Hitherto, none has been discovered. We are nearly as barbarous as ever—it may be with a more polished, but a not less cruel barbarism than that which our ancestors suffered under my dread namesake, Ivan the Terrible. The suffering may be a little less : but, on the other hand, the bodies subjected to it are more sensitive from this civilisation, as they call it.

“I can see the use of sorrow. Mayhap, it has been serviceable to me : but is there not a great deal more of it than is needful to do the requisite work ? And then the animals ! Why should they suffer ? What can you claim for them in compensation for all their sufferings ? The scheme of the world is cruel, very cruel.

“I walked far away into this dismal country, yesterday. I came upon the great river before it loses itself in the marshes which make Pelem the fitting abode for exiles even under Elizabeth, surnamed the Clement. There was a mountain stream which flows into the great river. I ascended its banks, and came upon a mimic whirlpool. There was a huge log in it, one of those which are sent down by the hewers of wood upon the mountains. It had not had force enough, given it in its departure, to escape the unceasing action of this mimic whirlpool. Round and round it went ; and every time that it came to the spot at which it ought to have descended, there was a momentary pause ; but the whirling current was too strong, and took it round again. It was the life of any individual man. It was my life, infinitely solitary, obeying no impulse of its own, and not the impulse even of those who would more rightly direct it. I watched the thing for

hours ; and saw the progress—progress !—of my own most felicitous life.

“A very ingenious creature, man ! How one might praise him ! how exalt his great qualities—his forethought, his force, the myriad modes he has of trying to withstand his enemies, and to conquer his naked and miserable condition. But it is a pity that he expends so large a part of his ingenuity, at least the better half, in tormenting his fellow-man, and preparing assured misery for himself.

“My uncle, the great Duke of Courland ! It is a clear night, and I am looking upon these innumerable stars. Are they inhabited ? And, if so, is government there anything like what it is here ? His Highness seemed to think that the art of government was in keeping everybody down—everybody of whom he had the faintest suspicion that that body might presume to entertain any views of things on earth, or things in heaven, in the least degree opposed to the perfect wisdom of His Highness. And yet there was something in what he said. For if there were not Dukes of Courland, they would all be flying at each other's throats ; and perhaps it would have been worse without him than even with him. Who knows ? I wonder what he is doing now ? It must be very miserable to have no one to oppress. But there was much good in him ; and he bore the truth, when it was once told him. How I trembled as I told it !

“Nariskoff : what a man ! There might have been a great deal of use made of that man. But nine-tenths of what is useful in mankind is thrown away. The poor fellow thinks that this

world was only made for him to sneer at. And I am not much better than he is. He thought that I marked him not when he was striving to protect that black creature from the ants to-day. I saw it all; but what is the use of endeavouring to interfere with the beneficent course of nature? I knew that it was a shallow attempt, as shallow and unfeasible as his wild notion of freeing his serfs, to rescue that black wriggling thing from its tormentors and devourers. I am older than Nariskoff, though he does not know it—older in heart, older in mind, older in misery.

“ They were meant to be a comfort to us, I suppose. Are they? Poor creatures as we men are, we do look a little below the surface, and do look a little beyond the home, and the nursery, and the city, and the court. The Court! Whereas it is all surface with them. Rank, wealth, court favour, fine dress, jewels, all the minor decorums, these are their divinities. I do not wonder that Azra loves the stage—it is the fitting place for all women—and that the Princess loves the court, only a larger and less artistic stage. What a fool I have been! I recollect now, and I declare that memory has been a truant to me from that time to this: that she said to me when we were sitting in the wood together, acknowledged lovers—“ Are you noble, dear Ivan? I wish that you were noble.” I ought to have seen through her worldliness then: but we men are the veriest fools in creation. The lion understands his lioness far better than a man does the woman that he loves. Oh, but she *is* lovely. She would delude a saint, or an angel, or even a devil. And what chance had I, a mere honest innocent youth, of understanding

such a creature? Even now, though I know her well, I dare not watch her as she moves along among other women, not like any of them, but with a grace, a beauty, and a loveliness that is only her own. Why were such creatures invented to deceive us? But I will think no more of her. I wonder what Horace really meant by that passage. (Here Ivan quoted a passage from one of the satires, which has been a difficulty to critics from his time to ours, and which was probably written down wrong in the waxen tablets on which those immortal poems were first engraved by the poet's stylus.)

"What an anti-climax, life! How we are fondled, and dandled, and made much of, just when we cannot understand the fondling, and when it is probably a great nuisance to us. Then, from childhood onwards, we are less and less loved, until, at length, the liking of the meanest serf would be very dear to one—a precious possession!

"If death would give one time to think, freed from the necessity of acting, it might be no great evil. It came into my mind that I should like to have died with her in my arms in that morass. What folly!

"The world is given up to hard and self-sufficing people. They alone prosper. Unembarrassed by the pain they cause, by the feelings they trample upon, by the ruins they walk over, on they march complacently to victory. They need not sympathy: they heed not antipathy: they are to themselves their own sufficient audience, and require no alien applause. They are the conquerors of the world."

To the other extracts from Ivan's diary, however crude and morbid, no objection has here been made. This one, however, cannot be allowed to pass without some comment, for it embodies a delusion which is rife even at the present time. Men are still thought to be sagacious and capable, merely because they are hard. But let the hard man have sufficient scope wherein to develope his hardness, and to demonstrate his want of sympathy with other men—and ultimate failure is the result. After all, there are a great many men, women, and children in the world: it is not altogether composed of sticks and stones.

“When I look back upon my past life (one would think he had lived for 50 years at least) I perceive that all my errors have proceeded from my imagination. If I had seen things and persons as they really are, I should not have been thus befooled by them. If imagination had been a good gift, it would have been given to more people than it has been given. Those are most miserable who have the most of this dangerous quality.

“All other wisdom is superfluous for those who are wise enough, and strong enough, to live alone.”

The exact words used by the Empress, when she was storming up and down the reception-room of the Winter Palace, and upbraiding the recreant lovers with their folly, are not to be found in these extracts. Perhaps the Czarina only gave what she thought to be the substance of some of Ivan's remarks in his diary; or, again, the very words might have occurred in other extracts, though they are not to be found in these.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER XI.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF NARISKOFF AND AZRA.

THERE was one curious and unexpected result of the reception which the Empress had given for the purpose of uniting Ivan and the Princess, and which had ended so disastrously. Nariskoff and Azra became intimate and affectionate friends.

Nariskoff was wont to say that the principal difference between love and the bite of a mad dog was, "that in the former case the effect of the poison was instantaneous, whilst in the latter it lingered long in the constitution before its fatal outbreak."

There are many distinctions to be drawn between love and liking; but the rapidity of the effect is similar in both cases. Each of these two new friends had heard a very unsatisfactory character of the other. In earlier days, Ivan, when speaking to Azra of his first exile at Pelem, had described Nariskoff to her as a very remarkable man, as,

indeed, a man of some genius, but, at the same time, as a very discreditable and malicious person. During Ivan's second term of exile, he had not spared Azra, when enlarging to Nariskoff upon the general faithlessness and worthlessness of women. When these two, Nariskoff and Azra, had met in the grand reception-room at the Palace, each thought that Ivan had spoken most unjustly of the other, and was the more disposed, on that account, to think favourably of the other.

It seems, too, as if it was necessary for Nariskoff to attach himself to some one person, and to follow his or her fortunes assiduously. In the present instance it was not destitution which compelled this devotion on his part. The Empress had been true to her word, and had provided employment, of a clerkly nature, in her Chancery for Nariskoff.

His labours were not so absorbing, but that he had much spare time; and all of it was given to attendance upon Azra. With her he became a great authority in all matters relating to her art. Originally a man of fine taste, and of as high a cultivation as was then to be obtained in Russia, he was really able to be of great service to a prima donna, who, however rich in natural gifts, had undertaken a career, which, to be consummately successful, does require large and liberal cultivation. Besides, Azra, still much unskilled in the ways of the world, and very artless in all matters not immediately connected with her own profession, often needed a protector of her interests, and one who should, in some measure, fulfil the part of a father to her. Nariskoff delighted in doing this. It gave him a certain consequence with other people: it gave him

what he had much needed for many years—self-respect.

It is a shrewd remark that has often been made in the present era of the world:—namely, that those nations are very felicitous in which there is an opportunity for sudden and complete change of career. America, for instance, offers this opportunity; and in all countries where, from similar circumstances, this kind of change is possible and frequent, great benefits to the individual inhabitants of that country will ensue.

Nariskoff was able, even at this mature period of his life, to commence, as it were, living afresh: and the man had sufficient force of mind and purpose to make the most of his new start in life.

Some cynical and perverse people have disbelieved in the possibility of the continuance of profound friendship between persons of different sexes, without its degenerating into love on one side or another. Now, in this case, there was no thought of love on either side. Nariskoff had the good sense to recognise this at once. He knew he possessed few attractions as a lover; but that he could be a very serviceable and affectionate friend. Moreover he knew, and fully appreciated, that fact, which had been, for so long a time, undiscerned by Ivan—that Azra was one of those singular characters, the whole passion of whose lives is thrown into the development of the work which they think, perhaps too fondly, it is especially given for them to do. It is, perhaps, hardly just to say that this is singular, for there are many more instances of it than are generally recognized.

Azra, on her part, thoroughly understood and

appreciated the relation that had grown up between herself and her new friend. If the truth must be told, she had never liked anybody so much as the old gypsy, the chief of her tribe, who had been kind to her in her childhood; and she now transferred this sort of liking to Nariskoff. But it was a liking which, although exceedingly great, would never pass the barrier which separates the most extreme liking from even the faintest love.

To Nariskoff she could tell all her troubles and her difficulties. He was to conciliate, or rule obtuse managers; to persuade, or terrify recreant actors and actresses into taking and fulfilling the parts which the prima donna had resolved to assign to them. A point in her character, which had been dormant, or unobserved, in the earlier times of her career, now came forward with prominence. She was a little despot. She had been accustomed to witness in the proceedings of her own people, the great advantage of despotism. There, in that tribe, the chief had always been implicitly obeyed; and Azra, like the rest of them, had yielded him this obedience. Now that she was a great personage, she arrogated to herself similar dominion; and already in the course of her career, this proneness to demand obedience to all her whims and wishes, had been productive of much misery to herself, and much discomfort to all those who had to work with her in their common enterprise.

There was another circumstance which much endeared Nariskoff to Azra; and which, in all similar conjunctures, is very potent. It is a very flattering and seductive thing when any person, man or woman, behaves differently to you from what he or she does to the rest of the world.

Hence it is that some of the most disagreeable of human beings are intensely liked, or passionately loved, by some few persons, because those persons are honoured or gratified by a different course of conduct being shown to them from that which is administered to the rest of the world. Nariskoff, a powerful master of sarcasm, whose influence had chiefly rested upon that malign power, never indulged in anything approaching to sarcasm with Azra.

Several months had elapsed while this friendship between Azra and Nariskoff had been maturing. This time had passed in a very painful manner to the other principal personages of this narrative, with the exception of the Empress Elizabeth. After that memorable interview from which she had retired with disgust, she had made no effort to reconcile the lovers. They were fools, and as such were not worthy of further thought from her. She was too good-natured to visit their folly upon them by any unkindness on her part. On the contrary, she had thoroughly reinstated Ivan de Biron in her favour as an official person.

Once or twice, when receiving him upon matters of business, she had not been able to restrain herself from some droll or sarcastic allusion to his folly; but she had gone no further.

She had made the Princess Marie one of her maids-of-honour; and had, in like manner, more than once playfully made some allusion to the inutility of the presence of notaries when the persons principally concerned did not know their own minds, or had no minds of which any knowledge could be ascertained. But the Empress was always most kind and gracious to the

Princess Marie; and had even gone so far as to form another project for the welfare of the young lady, which project had reference to the new Austrian Ambassador.

It is not to be supposed but that Azra and Nariskoff talked frequently to one another of Ivan and the Princess Marie.

Nariskoff had to a certain extent given up his interest in these two young persons. In fact, he spoke of them much as the Empress thought of them, as two over-refined, fastidious, shallow young people, who did not know their own minds, and would not let any one else, any wiser person, disclose those minds to them, and thus make all things end like a novel, where the lovers, after infinite mystifications and innumerable delicacies of conduct, which no one can understand but themselves, at last, at any rate, contrive to come to what, as Nariskoff sneeringly observed, must be supposed to be a happy conclusion.

Azra, on the contrary, fully maintained her interest in the lovers; and was most deeply anxious that some conclusion should be arrived at. She had not changed her feelings towards Ivan, such as they had been for the two preceding years; and she loved and venerated the Princess as her earliest and best patron.

One evening, after a performance which had been more than usually well received by the Russian public at St. Petersburg, Azra and Nariskoff returned to her lodgings, to talk over the events of the evening, and to congratulate one another upon the adoption of some devices, both as regards scenes and scenery, which they had persuaded the manager, not without difficulty,

to allow them to arrange according to their peculiar artistic views.

Much of this had reference to a forthcoming opera, which had excited great expectations. Before they parted, Azra turned the conversation to the position of their two young friends. She had seen the Princess in the course of the day, and had been more struck than ever with the fading health, depressed spirits and overclouded beauty, which she had noticed in her friend, and which she justly attributed to the unhappy state of the Princess's mind.

The result of this conversation, in the influence it had upon the fertile brain of Nariskoff, will be seen in the ensuing chapter.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER XII.

THE PRINCESS MARIE AND IVAN ATTEND A REHEARSAL AT THE OPERA—BUT ARE NOT VERY USEFUL AS CRITICS.

“LET us have them here at a rehearsal; leave them alone; and see what will happen.”

These were the words of Nariskoff, suddenly uttered to Azra one morning when they were walking about the stage, and preparing for the new opera. They had together inspected the work of the scene painter; had held several conferences with the manager; had instructed the carpenters; and had assisted at a rehearsal of the ballet. This last piece of stage-business was one in which Azra took an interest generally unknown to persons of her high theatrical rank. She, herself, had been a most consummate dancer; looked upon dancing as a fine art; and often wished that she could descend, occasionally, from her high position, and be a leader in the ballet, as well as a great tragic actress.

Azra was not in the best humour, being dissatisfied with the performance she had just witnessed; and she replied to Nariskoff rather pettishly, but still with somewhat of her usual deference. "My little father, I doubt whether real love has ever been made in this region of the theatre—certainly not by the great lords who are permitted, contrary to my express desire, to come behind the scenes; and certainly not by the actors and actresses on the stage, at least according to my poor experience."

"You see, my dear Azra," said Nariskoff, "Ivan and the Princess are what are called 'original people.' These, according to my thinking, are among the greatest fools in existence. They will insist upon making for themselves the grooves to run in, instead of using the well-worn grooves that have been formed by their countless predecessors. The best energies of their early lives are wasted in fashioning these new grooves; and when they have made them, if they ever do make them, their own courses, still quite original no doubt, generally lead to the inane kingdom of Nowhere. I was myself an original; and see to what it has brought me. I must, forsooth, have notions about our serfs, three or four centuries at least too early. Not that I repent of that, for otherwise should I have known you? You, too, are an original; but we are both of a higher order than these young persons, who are, properly speaking, common-place people, but do not seem to know it."

"Young people!" exclaimed Azra. "If this goes on much longer, they will both be middle-aged people. As for poor Ivan, he is beginning to be grey. I think, though, that he is handsomer than ever."

Nariskoff was not very fond of hearing Ivan's good looks praised by Azra. He replied, "It certainly is a great merit in you women that you do not mind the bloom being taken off the peach, especially when you have had some hand in removing it. I am afraid that we men are not quite so indifferent to the loss of youthful looks in the women whom we love. Much depends upon the cause, dear Azra. Now when I was a young man, I soon lost the bloom of youth; but it was from thought, deep thought, and over-anxious study."

"Let us not talk of ourselves, my little father; but what we can do for them," replied Azra.

The only thing which was still repugnant to Azra in her new friend, was his inordinate vanity. It shocked her simple, honest nature; and she always sought to discourage it.

She added. "I cannot say that this is exactly the spot I should have chosen as the fitting place for the reconciliation of two lovers. It seems to me that it would discourage all sentiment, and show the unreality of passion."

"Now you, dear Azra," replied Nariskoff, "are becoming commonplace. The semi-darkness, the singularity of the position, the strange loneliness, and I will take care that they shall be alone, may have a contrary effect to that which was to be found in the great reception-room of the Winter Palace. At any rate, let us try another extreme."

"They have often enough been alone together," said Azra.

"Oh yes," replied Nariskoff. "They were sufficiently alone together during their last

pleasant trip from Pelem to St. Petersburg. I heard a good deal about it from Ivan himself. Have you ever seen two girls sitting at a spinet, who thoroughly disliked each other? Girls sometimes dislike one another, you know. Well there they are, obliged to sit very close together, their little hands sometimes crossing one another; and all the harmony they succeed in bringing out from that tiresome, rattling, jingling instrument, fails to produce any harmony for their two discordant selves. They get up disliking one another still more if possible than ever.

"The company know nothing of this, any more than the poor Prince did, when his 'dear Ivan'—as he always calls him now—and his beloved Marie were supporting him in the telega."

"You are not very encouraging, Nariskoff," said Azra; "and you really seem to have taken a dislike to both of them."

"No: I don't dislike them. The philosophic mind is incapable of dislike."

"But mark you, I propose this plan only to please you, for I must confess they have almost ceased to be of any interest to me. As I have often said, I hate fools—people who do not know their own minds, and cannot see into other minds when they are as open as the day. Now I never—"

Azra, fearing a fresh outburst of egotism, interrupted his speech, and signified her assent to the plan.

It was easily carried into effect. Azra had only to ask the Princess to attend a rehearsal, to which Marie readily assented, on the supposition that she was to be a useful critic of the musical part of the performance; while Nariskoff had

only to tell Ivan that his judgment was much wanted as regards the effect of the scenery, in which Paris, a city well known to Ivan, was to be represented,

Azra, in her simplicity, had sought to make it what is called "a dress rehearsal;" but this the wiser Nariskoff imperatively put aside. He relied mainly upon the touching nature of the love scenes, which Azra and a new tenor, of very high qualifications, were to enact; and a dress rehearsal would only be a hindrance to his scheme.

The appointed day came. The Princess Marie and Ivan, each ignorant of the other being invited, arrived in due time at the theatre.

However much any one may be prepared for what he, or she, may see behind the scenes and at a rehearsal, the reality is nearly sure to outstrip the imagination. In those days, too, there was not that multiplicity of publication which, informing everybody of every obscure detail in the world, deprives almost every new and strange scene of much of its newness and its strangeness. To use a current commercial phrase, which is a very apt and significant one, all sight-seeing now is, to a certain extent, discounted by previous description.

The Princess was absolutely startled when, entering at the stage door, she was conducted by Azra into the *penetralia* of the theatre. The gaunt appearance of everything, the splotchy aspect of the painted scenery, the vastness of the space, the carpenters knocking and hammering up in the flies, the grim effect of the cordage and the mechanical contrivances—appalled her; and, for the moment, she drew back irresolutely. Azra took her hand, and led her to a

chair in front of the stage, just inside the foot-lights.

Ivan arrived a few minutes afterwards. He, of course, was not surprised by what he saw. He had been many times behind the scenes, during his courtship of Azra. Nariskoff seemed to have forgotten this fact, which might prove a drawback upon the success of his scheme. But Ivan's present revisiting of this part of the theatre, only served to recall very bitter memories to him. His past folly came vividly before his mind; and it was with a sense of humiliation that he accompanied Nariskoff, who had waited for him, to a seat in front of the stage. He was not a little surprised when he found the Princess Marie sitting near him.

Nariskoff took a chair between the two; and, after their first courteous and respectful greeting to one another, he prevented all further conversation between them, by a long and continuous explanation of the principal situations in the opera of which they were to witness the rehearsal.

It commenced; and still Nariskoff allowed no opportunity of conversation between Ivan and the Princess during the first and second acts. In the middle of the third he left them, saying that "the confounded carpenters would be sure to go wrong without his supervision." "You must know, my dear Ivan, our manager is almost a simpleton in these matters. He holds his place, as a good many of you great men hold yours—by the divine right of incapacity to fill it. I do not know what would happen if I were not to come to his aid. Look at his low forehead. There can be no sense in such a man. Besides he doesn't know a word of French; and that

little creature there, Mons. Duval, who has been fretting and fuming like an incipient volcano for the last half hour, is a fellow we have got from Paris, who supposes he is the only man who can put this thing upon the stage."

Both the Princess and Ivan felt the full awkwardness of their position; but, as well-bred persons, resolved to carry it through discreetly. They were secretly enraged with Azra and Nariskoff for bringing them thus together. They did not, however, discern any plot. Azra's devotion to the stage, and Nariskoff's devotion to her, were well known to them; and they merely thought what an instance of stupidity it was to have chosen the same day for the presence of both of them as critics.

They interchanged common-place remarks. The Princess said, "How well Azra was looking: the fatigue of her career did not seem to tell upon her." Ivan muttered something in reply about paint being judiciously employed by women, at which cross speech the Princess only smiled.

Ivan then said; "Who would have thought that our friend Nariskoff would have turned out to be the arch-manager of theatres? And he has lately become so amiable too. I suppose that all his sarcasms are kept for managers, actors, and actresses, as he lets the rest of the world go on in peace. By the way, Princess, have you read any of this Marivaux's works?" The words of the opera were Marivaux's: the music Rameau's.

The Princess had hardly time to answer in the negative, before Azra and the principal tenor came to the front of the stage. Hitherto, in this act, there had only been some choral songs,

during which talking might be allowed to the spectators. Now there was dead silence.

Nariskoff, not quite so wise as he supposed himself to be, had intended this to be a most touching scene, capable of evoking love in all human breasts. The good man, himself, had always been much affected by it; but then he had become used to the sorry surroundings which are inevitable in such a rehearsal. With the Princess Marie and Ivan the effect was different; and it seemed as if this, like all schemes for the same purpose, was to produce quite a contrary effect to that which had been desired or expected. With them the shrewd saying had been verified. "Out of the antidote comes in the long run a poison,"* only that, in their case, the process had been swift, and all the antidotes, which the Empress, or Azra, or Nariskoff had administered, had only served to produce at once fresh alienation.

It was a very cold day, cold even for Russia at that time of the year; and the new tenor was furred up to the throat. Azra was in a very warm and homely dress. They both sang admirably; but their gestures of affection only indicated, not developed or consummated (for Azra, with her usual feelings in such cases, did not much like the tenor; and he was mortally afraid of her) had something inexpressibly ludicrous about them. Air-drawn embraces, kisses that are indeed but given to the winds, and arms encircling only fancied waists—are not exactly the most fitting means to bring to mind and reinforce the suppressed passion of mutual and devoted love.

* Aus dem Gegengift wird in die Länge ein Gift.—*Jean Paul Richter*.

The Princess had a keen sense of the ludicrous; and Ivan was not devoid of that perilous possession. Each could perceive that the other was with difficulty restraining laughter. Each saw that the book of the opera, with which Nariskoff had furnished them, was held with an unsteady hand.

Ivan spoke first. There was just a little bitterness in his feelings towards Azra. No man, however much he may have conquered his love for a woman, is entirely pleased at her having conquered her love, if she ever had any, for him.

"Our excellent Azra," he said, "how well she sings! But she is very like one of the carpenters we can still see in those upper regions, Princess, awaiting the return of the chorus to recommence his hammering."

"I fail, Sir, to see the resemblance," responded the Princess; "but no doubt there is some deep meaning in your observation."

"I only mean," rejoined Ivan, "that she is as free from the full tenderness and passion of the scene as that carpenter. They both only care for their own work, and hammer away at it nobly."

"But her 'work,' Baron, as you are pleased to call it, consists in the passion of the scene, and that she does admirably."

"Then, Princess, why were you so inclined to laugh? 'Does it admirably'—yes the scenic foretaste of a scenic representation—a double fiction! Oh! no doubt she 'does it admirably.' But he, the poor tenor, really feels it, or something like it. We men are a little more heartfelt and truthful, even on the stage."

“And we women, Sir, off it.”

Notwithstanding this somewhat sharp encounter of wit, in which a great deal more was meant than was said, there was something in the tone of voice, and in the look of the Princess as their eyes met, which induced Ivan to get up from his place, and take the chair left vacant by the crafty Nariskoff, a movement which was tacitly acquiesced in by the lady, although she slightly drew back from the position, (that of leaning towards him) which she had occupied during the utterance of the foregoing sentences.

There was, then, silence between them for the next two or three minutes, while the prima donna and the first tenor, who had hitherto sung in solo, joined in a final duet of much fervour and fondness, that is as far as the singing was concerned. Then the chorus of inappropriately dressed peasants, for they were in their everyday clothes, came forward to express their joy at these proceedings of the principal performers; and the distant hammering re-commenced.

Again, there was a subject of much mirth for the two spectators. The principal peasant, to whom the tenor confided his many sorrows throughout the *opera*, was a man gifted with a highly comic cast of features. In fact he was one of the chief actors in low comedy; and, in that capacity, was well known to all the frequenters of the theatre at St. Petersburg. He happened to be an excellent musician, and a severe leader of a chorus; and, though Azra and Nariskoff had felt the greatest doubts about entrusting this part to him, they had not been able to find any one at St. Petersburg who, to use Ivan's phrase, could do the work so well. They,

too, had been very sensitive as to the effect that might be produced by this man's comicality; and Nariskoff had wasted hours in endeavouring to make him change his usual expression of feature and his habitual drollness of gesture, for expressions and gestures more suitable to the character of a confidant of that much-enduring first tenor. This effort had only produced something still more ludicrous.

Nothing creates more sympathy and more harmony among people than a similar appreciation of what is ludicrous. Bitter enemies have sometimes forgotten their enmity, even in the midst of fierce debate, when something has occurred which excited equally the risible tendencies of both of them. And here were two human beings who, without any outward and accidental provocation, were, though they would not recognize it, in the deepest and most abiding sympathy with each other. They were both eminently polite and highly-bred personages. Ivan had now much more of the sustained manners of the man of the world than had been the case in the earlier days of their acquaintance.

They strove hard to maintain the proper gravity of countenance; and all the harder, because they felt that the great comic actor played at them, his only audience. Still they could not restrain themselves from occasional comments in whispers, in which, somewhat to the astonishment of both of them, insensibly the words "Ivan" and "Marie" glided into the conversation.

Once, too, Ivan touched the Princess lightly, wishing to draw her attention to the upper regions, where two of the carpenters had sus-

pended their work ; and, laughing boisterously, were regarding their favourite actor, the only one they cared to listen to.

It was the touch that is like no other—the touch of the one who loves us best, and whom we love best.

And so the play went on. From what was mirthful, Ivan, grown more daring, and thinking that this might be the last chance he should ever have of ascertaining what he most desired to know, deviated in his talk to what was more serious, though still entirely bearing upon the scenes enacted before them. He even ventured to say “These happy peasants on the stage, Marie, are not quite so happy, I fear, when they get home through the melting snow, as some real peasants, or what for the time were little other than peasants, whom I have known ; but then,” he added with a sigh, “those peasants I speak of, were at some distance from St. Petersburg.”

The Princess paused before she made any reply to this pointed speech. She knew that it was the critical moment of her life. She literally trembled as she thought of this. It was in vain that the comic actor, who had again come forward on the stage, and in the most highly tragic-comic manner, was declaring in a loud ‘aside’ to the audience, that, in his opinion, “all would yet be right, however badly things might look just now :”—and, while so saying, the good man was never more comical both in his countenance and in his gestures. The Princess was not consoled by his promise of future joy to the actors on the stage, or moved to laughter by the drollness of the manner in which these pleasing assurances were given. Still looking fixedly

at the actor, she felt in the background of her mind (and the mind is surely double!), how ludicrous all this was upon the stage, and withal how serious the present moment was for the unemployed actors sitting near the footlights.

At length, after what seemed to her an interminable time, though it had only occupied a few brief moments, she replied with a firmness of tone that astonished herself. "There is one peasant, Ivan, a girl whom I once knew, who has been far more unhappy at St. Petersburg than she ever was, even in the earliest times of her peasant life, when furthest from St. Petersburg."

The thrill of delight with which Ivan heard these significant words may be imagined. He was, however, very judicious, and did not presume immediately upon them, or indeed venture to make any reply. This reticence on his part, though prudent, was very painful to the Princess; and she felt a kind of remorse—the remorse that pride feels on having made an acknowledgment which it has reason to believe has met with no response from the other side.

Little else passed between them during the rest of the rehearsal; and, when it was over, they still remained in their seats. They saw Azra and her ardent but subdued tenor separate with a slight bow, he choosing the left wing, and she the right, as their points of exit from the stage. They saw the poor peasants slouch away in a manner very little corresponding with the joy they had recently expressed on the stage, at the happy conclusion of the opera. They saw the performers in the ballet take their departure—the stage-friendliness still to be seen

among some of the girls, who, with clasped hands, executed a final pirouette as they made their exit. They saw Monsieur Duval and the manager move off together, the emphatic Frenchman gesticulating, and apparently protesting against somebody or something, to the last.

And then they were indeed alone, and were, for a few minutes, silent. At length, according to the formal courtesy of those days, he offered her his hand, and proposed that they should make together a further survey of these strange desert regions. He had, he said, before, learnt something about them.

This was not a very judicious remark; and Ivan fancied he felt a slight withdrawal of her hand from his. He bit his lips, and inwardly cursed his folly, knowing that she must think that it was during his pursuit of Azra, that he had become so familiar with the ways behind the stage.

Meanwhile, the cunning Nariskoff had been peeping at them through an aperture in one of the scenes, and had been delighted to observe that Ivan had taken his chair, and that, too, at a time when Nariskoff supposed that the situation on the stage had been most touching and effective.

Little he dreamt, though the discovery would not have been displeasing to his satirical nature, that it was the ludicrous and not the serious feature of the rehearsal that had brought about this proximity.

At the end of the rehearsal, he had rushed into the green-room to tell Azra the apparent success of *his* scheme, as he called it, and to warn her to abjure all civility, and to keep herself away from the "idiots." "Let them wander

about and lose themselves : they will perhaps find a little common sense while they are thus lost. Oh ! you must have moved their hearts, Azra. I never heard you greater. It would have re-melted two hardened bits of lava, to have heard you in that third act. I don't deny that my tears were very near my eyes, and they are generally a very long way off, I can tell you, my dear."

And Marie and Ivan did lose themselves ; for they wandered about aimlessly, the last thought, or wish, of either being to find an exit from that bewildering place. Little need is there of words when two human creatures, who are beyond all measure fond of one another, are wandering about hand-in-hand, saying next to nothing to one another but the utmost trivialities in open speech, yet telling everything to one another by that low, murmuring tone of fondness well known to lovers, and perhaps, too, by that indescribable gladness of approach which the lightest touch, or the faintest pressure, will abundantly disclose.

It is somewhat of a hard case for the man, but it is imperatively requisite for him, on such occasions, to say something which shall no longer be dubious, and which shall bring matters to a definite conclusion, one way or the other. Considering all that had passed between these two, it was not surprising that Ivan still hesitated to say the final words which were needful. Indeed one wonders how any thoughtful person, cognizant as he must be of his many failings and of the largeness of the enterprise he is about to undertake, can summon up the audacity to say, in the spirit, if not in the words, of the old song "Oh, come with me, and be my love."

Ivan made this great venture thus:—"The Empress is a very wise woman, Marie, and a very good woman, is she not?"

The Princess Marie hesitated a little to assent to the latter part of the proposition; but, with feminine tact, replied:—"She is everything, Ivan, that is most kind, and most gracious; and she makes my father so happy by her goodness to me; but—"

Ivan hurriedly interposed:—"But of her wisdom there is no doubt, Marie; and never was she more wise than when she said, 'We were two fools, and did not know our own minds.' I wonder she did not order us to be beheaded then and there, only that she has an unaccountable objection to depriving herself of any of her loving subjects, in this summary fashion. But she was wise then, Marie?—Say yes."

The Princess withdrew her hand from his, and retired a step or two from him. Then, looking up at him timidly and shyly, she merely said:—"I think she was."

Ivan drew her towards him, held her in his arms, and kissed her. The girl, instinctively, looked around and above her; and reproachfully said "Oh! Ivan;" for, on looking upwards, she had caught sight of the two carpenters to whom her attention had been drawn by Ivan during the rehearsal, and who were now regarding with high glee this additional scene which had not exactly been intended for their observation. Ivan's eyes followed hers; but he was not so easily disconcerted.

"They may have seen from those heights some scene of this kind, my love, before now; but they have never seen one in which there has been such truth."

“And such fidelity!” replied the Princess, with an arch smile, and in a tone not entirely devoid of sarcasm.

“Oh! Marie! What have you not to forgive?”

“And what have *you* not to forgive?” replied the Princess; “but I may offer the usual excuse of fools for their folly, ‘I did it for the best.’”

They said no more then; but resumed their wanderings; and we will not describe what happened when they were out of sight of the spies from the heights, and when they were assured that they were indeed alone. There were many fond explanations to be made; and much to be told which had, hitherto, been obscure and perplexing to both of them. At length they were interrupted by the presence of Azra and Nariskoff, who now thought that the lovers had been alone together for a sufficiently long time; and that, as there was no further pretext for their own absence, they must come forward to conduct their visitors from the theatre.

The outspoken Azra, at once assured of what had happened, for the way in which acknowledged lovers walk together is like that of no other companions, was ready with congratulations; but these Nariskoff repressed with a frown, and merely hoped that the opera had met with their approval, and that they would favour him and Azra with their criticisms.

The Princess and Ivan, however, were not in a critical mood, and they could only say that the acting, singing, and scenery, were, all, perfection. Nariskoff accompanied them to their sledges; and, after he had closed the door upon them, executed a dance of delight, which sent Azra

into fits of laughter, and which, she said, showed his superiority to the '*Dieu de la danse*,' the all-renowned Vestris, the delight of the Court of Louis the Fifteenth.

"My Azra," he exclaimed, "our Empress is a well-meaning woman and not devoid of intelligence; but when you come to real wit and real knowledge of mankind—and womankind too—I know some one who is greatly Her Majesty's superior. And some one else's too. This was not the place, these were not the surroundings, for the reconciliation of two lovers? You are a good girl, Azra, and not without some insight into things; but masculine wit still retains its supremacy."

Azra was too much delighted to contend the point; and Nariskoff hastened to convey the good news to the Empress Elizabeth. He did not do so, without letting Her Majesty be made thoroughly well aware how superior her poor servant was to any sovereign, in the management of love affairs.

The good-natured woman took all this boastfulness very pleasantly; praised Nariskoff warmly for his great sagacity; and ended by declaring that she would have the whole scene repeated over again, which, at the Palace, had previously been such a failure. It touched her honour, she said, that this should be done. And done it was, to the great joy, and amidst the welcome merriment, of all those who were interested in the event, and who had been witnesses of the former failure. The marriage was celebrated in the Winter Palace with all Imperial pomp and ceremony;—this part of the proceedings, however, not being much to the taste of either Marie or Ivan. But they were too happy to make any demur to the gracious wishes of their sovereign.

Not the least delighted of the bystanders was the old Prince Serbatoff. He had now secured a son-in-law whom he loved, and upon whom his accumulated wealth of worldly wisdom would never be wasted.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER XIII.

A SUMMING-UP OF THE FATE AND FORTUNES OF
THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES IN THE NARRATIVE.

EVEN living human beings are for the most part hardly more than phantoms to one another ; so little does man know about his fellow-men. An eloquent French writer has said :—*Sous cette enveloppe épaisse du corps, vous ressemblez à un voyageur qui, la nuit, dans sa tente, voit, ou croit voir, des fantômes passer.**

The beings we meet in books may be considered phantoms of the second order, still more phantasmal than those whom we encounter in real life. Yet some of the former seem to us to be very real ; and this is especially the case when, as in this work, personages are brought before us, who did at some time or other really exist, and respecting whom we have, at least, the impressions which those personages have produced upon another mind.

* LAMENNAIS. ' Paroles d'un Croyant.'

Such considerations may form an excuse for narrating briefly the events which happened to the principal personages of this story.

Love is not the only great thing in the world, and lovers are not the only interesting beings. And though his love may be the one "bright particular star" in a man's life, yet in the course of that life, it is perhaps of more importance, at any rate as regards his labours and his fortunes, whether he is liked than whether he is loved. For ever, even in times when men pretend to be most considerate and just, that proverb holds good, which proclaims the immense advantage of possessing those qualities which make men liked—which make them favourites with their own immediate circle and with the world—namely, that one man may leap the hedge which another man may not look over.

Ivan de Biron did, in an eminent degree, possess those qualities which make a man acceptable to all those with whom he is brought in contact; and accordingly, he rose, as might be expected, to high dignities and offices in the State.

Was he happy in domestic life?—a question we are always anxious to have answered about any remarkable man. It may be answered that he was. Not that it must be supposed that the somewhat difficult and perverse temper of the Princess was immediately rendered smooth and easy by marriage. But the patient and enduring nature of Ivan prevailed; and he was always tender towards her, ever recollecting what she had undergone for his sake. Sometimes, it is true, there threatened to be serious differences between this couple, not altogether well matched; and this was when the Princess's eager, impulsive nature drove her into injustice—a thing which Ivan could never tolerate.

The only person to whom the Princess ever confided any domestic trouble, was her good mistress, the Empress Elizabeth. From her the Princess always received the best advice. By reason of that delicate perception of character with which the Czarina was blessed, she understood Ivan even better than his own wife did. "My dear," she would say, "in almost all things, we are not only much better, but much wiser, than the men; but in one respect they are our superiors. They are far more just than we are. You may manage your Ivan, and have your own way completely (for, my dear, you do love to have your own way), except in some matter where justice, or what he thinks to be justice, is concerned."

The Princess was wise enough to profit by this advice; and so Ivan and his wife did ultimately live very happily together, the happiness increasing as the years went on.

Azra's renown grew greater, year by year; and she became one of the most distinguished actresses of her time. She was true to her resolve to make every feeling subservient to her art. Hers was not a long career, for she died, at that age so fatal to genius, thirty-seven, of a disease which, though not known at that time by that name, seems to have been diphtheria.

Nariskoff, who, giving up his situation in the Imperial household, had devoted himself entirely to watching over the interests and the welfare of Azra, who had accompanied her to the principal capitals of Europe, and who had tenderly nursed her in her last illness, did not survive her long.

In fact his death followed hers in the short space of five months. It was a remarkable end-

ing of the life of a man who had, for the greater part of his mature years, loved nobody very much, and had been devoted to nothing but cynicism and sarcasm. It cannot be said that he died of a broken heart; but it may be truly affirmed that he died of an unemployed heart, of a heart that felt it had nothing more to do in this world, and so declined to go on with needless pulsations—a disease not catalogued in medical books, but much more frequent, perhaps, than the world is wont to imagine.

The fortunes of Kalynch must not be omitted. He passed his days in Ivan's family; and was, for the most part, a contented and a happy man. How can, indeed, a man be otherwise than happy, who has established a theory in his own mind which explains the course of human events—to other minds appearing so lawless and irregular?

Besides, Kalynch's theory was not merely explanatory, but deeply instructive, as it enabled him to judge rightly of all human affairs. What, to other people, might seem a misfortune, he knew to be a benefit; and what appeared to them a joy, he knew to be a calamity.

Ivan and Marie had two children. The first was a girl, the second a boy. The birth of the girl had come at a time when, according to the Kalynch law, a joy was to be expected; and, accordingly, Kalynch's countenance was as joyful as that of any other member of the household. When the boy was born, it was the time, according to that severe law, when a calamity should happen. Kalynch's countenance was the only one that wore gloom upon that occasion; which was celebrated with much festivity,

by Ivan's friends and dependants. Kalynch would have rejoiced, if he could have done so honestly ; but this was not possible. Henceforward Kalynch, who always indulged in the belief in general laws, (laws subservient to his own,) concluded that the birth of girls was a blessing, and the birth of boys a misfortune. The world might differ from him on this point ; but, according to Kalynch, the world was generally wrong in its conclusions.

"I suppose," he said, addressing the other servants, "you imagined that it would have been a fine thing if master had married that great actress ; but I think I saw a little further than the rest of you then. Not that it was my wisdom, but that I knew what must be, according to the principle which rules the course of all human events. Yes, yes, he has said it.

The Empress Elizabeth had not a very long reign ; but it was a very glorious one. The glory, however, so far as it was gained by her success in arms, continued to be most painful to her ; and, on the occasion of her great victory at Cunersdorf, she betrayed to the world the agony she felt at the deaths of so many "innocent persons," as she justly called them.

There is a letter of Louis XV. which indicates the anxiety that Elizabeth always manifested in the interests of peace. She had intimated to the King her desire to be a party, as a mediatrix, to the treaty of the Quadruple Alliance. The King in reply wrote thus :—

Le dessein que votre majesté a conçu d'être la médiatrice des Puissances qui sont en guerre, est digne de votre cœur, et touche sensiblement le mien. C'est un nouveau sujet de vous admirer ! Tous

les Princes vous en doivent des remerciemens, et les miens sont d'autant plus sincères, que je vois mes desirs les plus chers secondés par les vôtres. Je peux vous jurer, Madame ma sœur, que je n'ai jamais eu les armes à la main, que dans les vues d'assurer la paix; et mes succès fortifiant ces sentimens, les revers seuls auraient pu les rendre moins vifs.

C'est à la Souveraine à qui je dois le plus d'estime, que les nations devront le plus grand bienfait. Les Rois ne peuvent aspirer chez eux qu'à faire la félicité de leurs sujets; vous ferez celle des Rois et des Peuples. Vous en serez, s'il se peut, Madame, plus chère, plus vénérable aux vôtres; et votre règne en sera plus heureux, quand les bénédictions de l'Europe redoubleront celles qu'on vous donne dans vos États.

Such were the consistent efforts which this great Empress made to avoid the bloodshed both of her own people, and of the people of allied or hostile nations. Her career offers a singular example of how little any one person, however highly placed, can effect, when endeavouring to counteract the general tenour and tendency of the age in which he or she has the fortune, prematurely if so it may be said, to live. And, indeed, it is doubtful whether she could have accomplished much more of her peaceful designs even in this Age, still very prone to indulge in what ought to be the obsolete barbarism of war.

There is every reason to think that the favourable change which has, in the course of the narrative, been indicated as taking place in the Duke of Courland's character, became permanent. He ultimately regained his Duchy; but history

makes no mention of any further severities on his part; and, before he died, he abdicated in favour of his son.

Marshal Münnich remained to the end of his life, and he lived to the age of eighty-four, the same active, energetic, brilliant man, full of schemes and projects of all kinds, as he proved himself to be in the events that have been recorded here. He, too, seems to have been much improved by exile; for, as will hereafter be seen, he maintained his fidelity under circumstances of great difficulty, and when he must have perceived that this fidelity might prove his ruin.

At Elizabeth's death, an incident took place which does not redound to the credit of those eminent Christians, for such they had become, the Duke of Courland and Marshal Münnich, although the result could hardly have been otherwise.

Peter III. succeeded Elizabeth on the throne of the Russian Empire. This Czar has usually been considered insane; but I fail to see any clear signs of madness in his reign of a few months—a reign cut short by the wicked intrigues of his wife Catherine II. One of his first acts was to recall from Siberia the political exiles of every kind, who were located there; and also, which might not have been a very wise proceeding, to bring them to his Court. Among these exiles were Marshal Münnich and his family. The Duke of Courland was also invited from Jaroslaw to attend the Emperor's Court. The benevolent madman, if madman he were, formed the project of uniting these two great personages in an abiding friendship. It certainly was a very bold project; and it required an

enthusiasm of hopefulness, which the bystanders might well call madness, to suppose that this attempt would be effectual. There are hardly any two personages known in history, whose hostility has been more injurious to each other, than that of these two celebrated men. It may be recollected that their last meeting had been in sledges on the bridge near Kazan, when the Duke of Courland was returning from the little house at Pelem which the Marshal had been so kind as to design for him, with its prison-like form and its narrow windows looking only into a back court. They had then merely saluted one another, the one coming from exile, the other going to it, by lifting their furred caps. It was indeed an enterprise of difficulty to make two such men friends. The first time that they were in the presence of the new Emperor, he beckoned them towards him. "Ah!" he said, and what he said might well appear to be not a very sane saying, "Here are two good friends; they must drink together."

This drinking together had a great meaning in that Age.

The Czar ordered wine to be brought, poured out two glasses with his own hand, and presented one to each of these great personages. At that moment, a certain man of the name of Gudowitzch came into the room, went straight to the Czar, and whispered something to him. It has always been conjectured that Gudowitzch's whisper had reference to the conspiracy, then already in active formation, which was to deprive the Czar of his throne and of his life. He drew back immediately, went out of the room with Gudowitzch, and remained a long time away. As soon as he had left, the Duke and the Marshal eyed one

another with a look that spoke of anything but forgiveness and of the possibility of friendship between them.

They then put down the untasted glasses of wine upon the table, and turned their backs upon each other.

When the Emperor re-entered the room, he seemed to have forgotten all about this intended scheme of reconciliation; and well might he have done so, if that infamous plot, hatched under his wife's auspices, had been for the first time disclosed to him.*

In the fearful transactions which shortly afterwards took place at the Court of Russia, Münnich was the truest and best counsellor to the wretched Emperor; and, if the Czar had but taken his advice, Catherine II. would not have been able to consummate the murder of her husband. It must, however, be said in praise of her sagacity, as well as of her placability, that she did not bear any ill-will to Münnich on

* Als Biron und Münnich sich das Erstemal bey Hofe sahen, rief ihnen Peter III. entgegen: "Ah, da sind ja zwey alte gute Freunde, diese müssen zusammen trinken." Er liess sogleich Wein geben, goss ein und gab selbst jedem ein Glas. In dem Augenblicke trat Gudowitzch ins Zimmer, und sagte dem Kaiser etwas ins Ohr (hinterdrein erfuhr man, dass es ein entfernter Wink gewesen war, den Monarchen auf die künftige Revolution aufmerksam zu machen, den er aber nicht achtete.) Peter III. ging hinaus, und blieb lange weg. Sobald er sich entfernt halte, sahen sich Biron und Münnich mit dem ernstestn Blick der unterdrückten Rache an, und mit einer Bewegung setzten sie die Gläser auf den Tisch, und wendeten sich den Rücken zu. Der Kaiser kam ins Zimmer zurück, hatte aber zum Glück die Aussöhnung vergessen, denn schwerlich würden Biron und Münnich bey der Farce dieser Scene in ihrer Miene den Ausdruck ihres Charakters haben erhalten können.

account of the advice he had given, and the aid he had tendered, to the Emperor; and that the Field Marshal continued to live at her Court, honoured, trusted, and even employed in the execution of great engineering works.

‘Vous avez voulu combattre contre moi,’ lui dit cette princesse. ‘Oui, Madame,’ lui répondit le vieux feld-maréchal; ‘pouvais-je moins faire pour le prince qui m’a délivré de la captivité? Mais c’est à présent mon devoir de combattre pour Votre Majesté, et je le remplirai avec dévouement.’

Perhaps the happiest personage of all, was the old Prince Serbatoff. He had always with him a loving daughter; and the Princess Marie Andréevna de Biron was one of those women who are, or seem to be, more docile to a father than to a husband. It appears to be inconsistent with their inmost feelings of duty and of religion to contend with one who, however small his gifts may be compared with theirs, is placed by nature in a position of command over them, compelling obedience and even veneration on their part.

The Prince’s happiness was greatly increased by having such an admirable son-in-law as Ivan—one who could appreciate all the Prince’s courtly sagacity, and whose gradual rise in official rank and power was a constant source of delight to his worldly father-in-law.

This rise, it must be confessed, sometimes puzzled the good Prince, and ultimately induced him, rather against the grain, to enlarge the sphere of his worldly wisdom. Very late in life he was heard to say that, after all, in the case of some extraordinary persons (not for the world in

general and not in dealing with most people) it was desirable that they should speak out what they really thought. His Ivan had always done so but it was not a habit to be recklessly and loosely indulged in.

Such was the fate and such were the fortunes of the principal personages in this story—a narrative which has attempted to give some representation of several of the chief events during the eighteenth century in that Empire which has since gone on increasing in greatness; which, in the liberation of its serfs, has given to mankind an extraordinary example of daring humanity; and which, if it advances with equal persistence in social and moral well-being, as material prosperity, is evidently destined to become one of the most beneficent as well as one of the foremost Powers of the world.

THE END.

[December, 1882.]



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